THE LIVES OF THE RAKES

VOLUME II.

THE RESTORATION RAKES

BY E. BERESFORD CHANCELLOR.

THE LIVES OF THE RAKES.

VOL. I.
"OLD ROWLEY."

VOL. II.
THE RESTORATION RAKES:
BUCKINGHAM, ROCHESTER, DORSET,
SEDLEY, ETHEREDGE, WYCHERLEY.

VOL. III.
CHARTERIS AND WHARTON.

VOL. IV.
THE HELL-FIRE CLUB:
SANDWICH, DASHWOOD,
WILKES, CHURCHILL, ETC.

VOL. V.
"OLD Q" AND BARRYMORE.

VOL. VI.
THE REGENCY RAKES: THE REGENT
HERTFORD, HANGER, ETC.

THE DUKE OF YORK.

(FROM A MINIATURE BY SAMUEL COOPER.)

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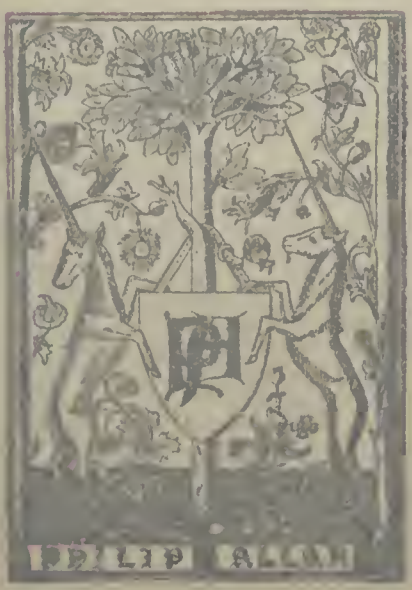

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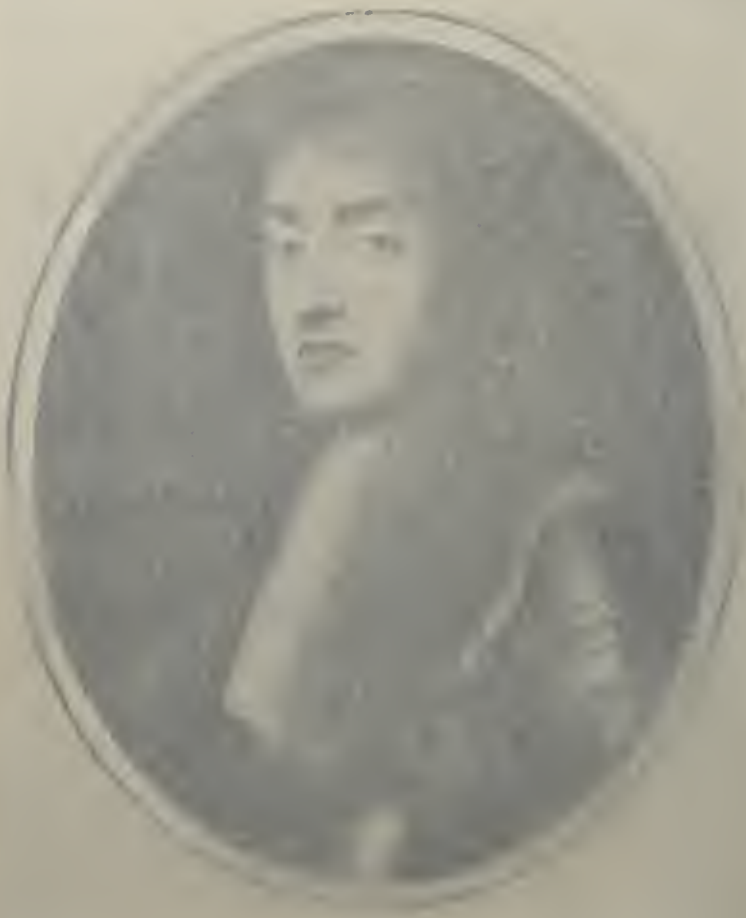

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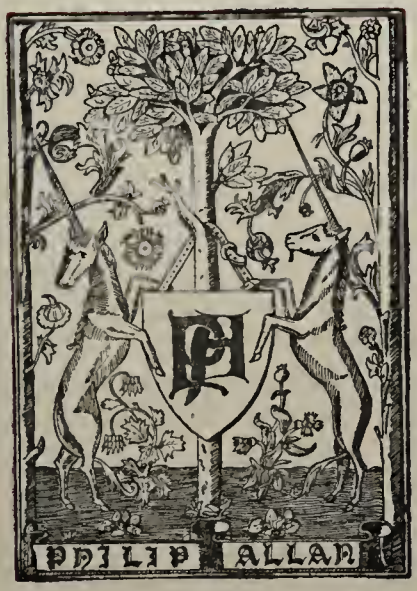

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FOREWORD.

THE following accounts of some of the more outstanding rakes of the Restoration deal chiefly with that aspect of their careers which is indicated by the epithet. Neither the political side of Buckingham's character, nor the literary portion of Wycherley's career, for instance, are developed, for one very good and sufficient reason, that both have been fully dealt with already. It is simply as gay men of pleasure that these and the rest are here presented. If this aspect is not the most becoming one, it is at least the most decorative, and, as they themselves undoubtedly found it, the most amusing. Those who are interested in the political side of these men's careers will know very well where to find it fully developed, the literature of the period being an extraordinarily full one. Something, of course, had to be said about other aspects than the mere frivolous ones of these merry men; but as this book aims at amusing rather than instructing, this portion of the subject has been made subsidiary.

E.B.C.

CONTENTS.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Portrait of—

GEORGE VILLIERS,
DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

THE life of George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham, is one of pure romance. Love and gallantry, buffoonery and wit, accomplished parts and mad pranks, have their share in it; while the brilliant efforts of the dramatist and the minor poet intermingle in the oddest way with the intrigues of the *dilettante* politician and even with the disloyalty of the too-favoured courtier. The name of this amazing personage has become synonymous with great powers prostituted and with splendid fortunes mishandled and dissipated. He was so "various" that the elements of all sorts of diverse characters were mixed up in him, and in the words of the great poet of the age he became "all mankind's epitome."

One can estimate Buckingham's character from much contemporary evidence; and from

the verdicts of such different writers as Clarendon and Burnet, Brian Fairfax and Madame Dunois, Evelyn and Grammont, one can collect material for a portrait which might be good if it were not like a kaleidoscope constantly changing its characteristics; and it is after all in Dryden's twenty famous lines (perhaps the most famous even he ever wrote) that we obtain a vignette, more telling and more descriptive than the full-lengths of biographers and historians, of that "blest madman," who was at once the spoiled darling, the witty mimic, and the dark conspirator of Charles's astonishing Court. The life of the second George Villiers has this in common with that of George Villiers the first: it presents excellent material for a tract—a tract in which splendid endowments, wealth, royal favour, public envy, good looks and fascinating manners, all led in the one case to a premature and tragic end, in the other to a miserable and almost a sordid one—a result not infrequently observable in the lives of rakes of both sexes.

Those who pass down Whitehall and observe the graceful screen with which Robert Adam masked Ripley's not very inspired Admiralty, are gazing on the site of what was once Wallingford House, the former abode of Sir William Knollys, Viscount Wallingford and Earl of Banbury. In 1622 this mansion was purchased by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and here

just five* years later was born the child who was to become the second Duke and last of his line. When the magnificent ceremonies connected with the birth and baptism of the heir to the Dukedom, ceremonies so dear to his father's heart, were in progress, with his royal master as a guest, the gorgeous Duke could little have supposed that he himself would fall by the hand of an assassin within seven months, or that the day (January 30th) of his son and heir's birth was to be a tragic anniversary for the House of Stuart, his King being destined to lose his head nearly opposite on another 30th of January which has become memorable, exactly twenty-one years later.

On the following August the 23rd the unerring hand of Felton gave to the child an inheritance as splendid as any in England. He became second Duke of Buckingham, Marquis and Earl of Buckingham, Earl of Coventry, Viscount Villiers, Baron Roos of Hamlake, and Baron Villiers of Whaddon, and potential master of all the estates and riches which his father had acquired during his short life of thirty-six years. When the time came for his education it was with the royal children that he learned his lessons, and thus began at an early age that close friendship with the future Merry Monarch which was to last until his wayward restless spirit threw him into

* Old Style, when the year ended upon March 24th. According to the present, or "New" Style (which began in September, 1752), the Duke was born on January 30th, 1628.

the arms and counsels of that monarch's enemies. We are told that the Duke was educated at Christ Church, but as he is known to have received the M.A. degree from Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1642, it is probable that his connection with Oxford may have been solely due to his accompanying the King and the Prince of Wales thither during the earlier years of the Civil War. According to Anthony à Wood, " after he had been carefully trained up under several tutors, he was sent to Cambridge for a time, and afterwards travelled. After his return, which was after the time that the grand rebellion broke forth, he was conducted to Oxford to his majesty then there, entered into Ch. Ch., and had a tutor allotted to him, being then 15 years of age." There is, however, no mention of him in the Dean's book, but as the copy of the record for that period is quite fragmentary and incomplete,* this is not conclusive.

With all the enthusiasm of youth supplemented by his hereditary loyalty and personal affection for the King, Buckingham threw himself with great ardour into the struggle and was so conspicuous by his bravery at the storming of Lichfield that the Parliament confiscated his estates, although it is but fair to that body to say that in consequence of the Duke's youth—he was but sixteen—his possessions were subsequently res-

* I am indebted to the Dean of Christ Church for his kindness in drawing my attention to this.

tored to him—an example of generosity not frequently to be found in the records of the Republican party.

The Duke and his brother Francis had hitherto been under the guardianship of Lord Gerard, but shortly after the Lichfield episode they were placed under that of the Earl of Northumberland, and with his consent left England in May, 1646, to make, under the care of one William Aylesbury,* what was formerly described as The Grand Tour. They appear, however, to have chiefly settled in Rome and Florence, where Abraham Woodhead, a famous controversialist of the day, was then domiciled and became the young men's tutor in mathematics. It throws a pleasant light on Buckingham's character that when at a later date this same Woodhead was deprived of his fellowship at Oxford, his former pupil was not unmindful of his instruction and gave him an asylum in York House, receiving him there as a friend and a member of his household.

When Buckingham returned to England in 1648, he might indeed seem to have been one to be envied. He brought "all the graces in his train," handsome, accomplished, with hereditary charm of manner, having been endowed by his father with the greatest name in the country, and by his mother with wealth beyond that of any other subject, nothing was wanting to com-

* Denbigh MSS.

plete the round of his accomplishments or his possessions. Nothing, one says; but, yes, there was one thing—stability of character, and it was the lack of this, a characteristic observable even then when he was but twenty-one, which nullified all his great gifts and finally stripped him of all his vast wealth.

At first, however, all was *couleur de rose*. He charmed everyone, even the Roundheads themselves; and even Burnet, with his severe Presbyterian outlook on life, had to confess that "he was a man of a noble presence, had a great liveliness of wit, and a peculiar faculty of turning everything into ridicule with bold figures and natural descriptions." He was destined to become the outstanding type of what may be called the Restoration spirit, which believed in nothing, laughed at everything, and if it gave itself to thought did so with a view to circumventing the honour of a man or in completing the destruction of that of a woman.

But not yet had such things taken a hold on the effulgent young duke. He still preserved the frankness, the fearlessness, the ardour, of youth, and returning to England he threw himself with characteristic impetuosity into the cause of which the sad-eyed King was still the protagonist, and the more decorative portion of the people the ardent supporters. He joined the Court at Oxford and his genial amusing presence must have done

much to enliven the spirits and buoy up the hopes of many a royalist who found himself rather wonderingly domiciled in the seat of learning drilling in cloistral quadrangles and retiring to unaccustomed Common Rooms converted for the nonce into guard rooms. One can imagine him even then with his supreme sense of the ridiculous and his incomparable gift of mimicry making fun of solemn dons and portentous heads of colleges. The field for such a display was unlimited, and while no doubt he was a godsend to the undergraduates he must have been a thorn in the side of many a musty student.

But this was only for a short time. Charles had become a prisoner in the Isle of Wight, things were in a desperate state with the Royal cause, and when the Earl of Holland raised his standard in Surrey in a forlorn attempt to turn Fortune's wheel, Buckingham and his brother Francis joined him. For the younger of them it was a tragic determination, for as Holland retreated from Kingston he came in touch with the Parliamentary forces near Nonesuch, and in the fight that ensued on July 7th, 1648, Francis Villiers fell mortally wounded. The Duke bore himself equally bravely but with better fortune, and managing to escape from the *dêbacle* he fled to St. Neots. On his way, however, he nearly met his death in a curious manner. Flying from the field his helmet came in contact with a tree,

with the result that it was turned completely round on his head. Tobias Rustat, his confidential servant, who was with him, was able to readjust the helmet, but only just in time to prevent its wearer being choked by its pressure on his throat.

Nor was this the only untoward incident that marked Buckingham's flight. On his way he was obliged to seek shelter in a house, and hardly had he done so before the place was surrounded by the enemy. There was nothing for it but to fight his way out, and ordering the outer gate to be suddenly opened he galloped furiously through and into the band stationed outside. After killing its commanding officer he fought his way among the rest and finally emerged untouched and rode off to a more secure retreat.

Making his way to the coast he eventually joined Prince Charles, then with a portion of the Fleet in the Channel. His refusal to surrender himself to the Parliament resulted in his estates of an immense yearly value being once again confiscated. Luckily for him, however, a certain old family retainer named Traylman was permitted by the authorities to live on quietly at the Duke's chief London residence, York House. This faithful servitor spent his time in secretly packing up and getting sent out of the country that marvellous collection of pictures which the first Duke had brought together under the superintendence of Sir Balthazar Gerbier, a collection

which rivalled in excellence those of Charles I and the Earl of Arundel, at that time the only two that could be compared with it. Buckingham was now at Antwerp, and it would appear that his chief if not his only means of subsistence was by the gradual selling of these pictorial treasures.

When Charles was invited to Scotland, Buckingham accompanied him; indeed, he was largely responsible for persuading Charles to take this step. Whether he really thought it might be the turning-point of the King's fortunes or whether he regarded the adventure as a welcome change after the monotony of Dutch life, certain it is that he found among the long-visaged, dour Presbyterians ample scope for his powers of ridicule and mimicry, and that he made full use of his opportunities. He was now gradually assuming that restless outlook on life which was destined to be his undoing.

After the Battle of Worcester, at which he was present and where he distinguished himself with his usual impetuous gallantry, he, together with the Earl of Derby, the Earl of Lauderdale, and others, endeavoured to get into touch with Leslie's routed troops, who were making for the north, but they were intercepted by the enemy and it was only after extraordinary adventures, during the course of which Buckingham had to dismount and proceed by devious ways on foot, that he succeeded in reaching temporary safety.

Having donned a countryman's clothes he made his way to Nottinghamshire, thence to the house of a relative in Leicestershire, and, finally, greatly daring, he proceeded to London. His adventures had been almost as thrilling as those of his royal master, and the crowning of them by entering the city where his enemies were paramount and lynx-eyed, and where at every turn a reward might be seen for his apprehension*—which meant almost certain death—was as characteristic of Buckingham's audacity and courage as was his subsequent behaviour in the metropolis.

In the amusing but garrulous and often involved narrative of Madame Dunois, describing the less solemn side of Court life (if that Court life can ever be said to have had anything but a gay and immoral side) we get a glimpse of the volatile Duke engaged in the most foolhardy exploits: bearding the Roundheads in their very dens, exhibiting himself as a show in the city where a momentary forgetfulness would undoubtedly have landed him on the scaffold. Let us hear what the lady has to tell of Buckingham at this period:—

"Being resolved not to shut himself up in some private place or other (as another perhaps would have done) he caused himself to be made a Jack-Pudding's coat, a little hat with a fox's tail on it and adorned with cock's feathers:

* On July 7th, 1648, the House of Commons resolved that he be proscribed and put to death.

sometimes he appeared in a Vizard mask, sometimes he had his face bedaubed with flower, sometimes with lamb (lamp, I suppose she means) black, according as the fancy took him. He had a stage erected at Charing Cross, where he was attended by violins and puppet players. Every day he brought forth new ballads (of his own making) upon what passed in Town, wherein he himself often had a share. These he sang before several thousands of spectators, who came every day to see and hear him. He also sold *Mithridate* and his *Galbanum* plaster, and thus passed away his time in the greatest security in this great city in the midst of his enemies whilst others were obliged to fly and to conceal themselves in some hole or other."

It must not, however, be supposed that such pranks as these were entirely aimless or merely aimed at the joyous occupation of amusing their perpetrator at the expense of an open-mouthed rabble ever ready to applaud antic behaviour and to be mystified by a mask or dazzled by a coloured feather. As in many of Buckingham's wildest freaks there was a motive underlying the buffoonery. He was able by this disguise to keep an eye on what was happening in London : he could gauge the significance of daily events : he could estimate the probabilities or otherwise of a change in public opinion ; and, what is more, he could, as we shall see he did,

by this means get into actual touch with his sister, who had become Duchess of Richmond and who was at that time closely guarded at Whitehall.

The Duchess did not know that her brother was in London, and with her husband a prisoner at Windsor she was largely cut off from any knowledge of what was passing among the friends of the King. It so happened, however, that she obtained permission to visit the Duke at Windsor, and Buckingham, who knew or soon found out everything that was happening, was made aware of this fact. He determined to greet his sister after his own fashion. Learning that she would pass by a certain spot on her way, he had his stage set up there and awaited the moment of her advent by singing his songs and indulging in his customary by-play. When her carriage came in sight, he cried out to the spectators that he would now give them a ballad on the Duchess of Richmond and the Duke of Buckingham. He proceeded to do so, when the mob immediately stopped the carriage, "the guards being willing enough to comply because they were glad enough to see her affronted." But not only did the rabble do this: they also forced the lovely lady (she was one of the handsomest women in the country) to alight from the body of the carriage and made her take her place in the boot in order that she should the better hear the witticisms and impertinences of the popular Jack Pudding.

Having finished his song, Buckingham told the crowd that he would now hand to the lady herself a copy of the verses he had just given them, and so, to use the words of the contemporary version of the story, "he comes down from his stage, loaden all over with papers and ridiculous little pictures." As he approached the Duchess's carriage he removed a piece of black cloth which he was in the habit of wearing over one eye the better to disguise himself, and his sister immediately recognised him. With remarkable presence of mind, however, she refrained from giving the least sign of her knowledge, and indeed addressed him in a very haughty and imperious way, as being the cause of her detention; at the same time she snatched from his hand the papers he was carrying, among which was a packet of letters, and throwing them into the coach ordered it to be driven on, the Duke with a portion of the mob following and attending it a good way out of London.

Nor was this the only adventure with which Buckingham met in his character of a public entertainer. He was accustomed during these exhibitions not only to sing and bandy witticisms with the crowd but also to dance, and in spite of disguise, as we are told, "his shape appeared so exquisitely fine and he danced on the stage with so good a grace," that he attracted the attention of more than one fair lady. Among those whose

thoughts were thus carnally attracted by his shape and graceful attitudes was, of all others, Bridget, the prim and proper daughter of the Lord Protector himself, a lady so enamoured of Republican principles, Noble tells us, that she could not even bear to hear the title of "Protector." She had been married to Ireton in 1642, and it was from him that she learnt her uncompromising ideas. But notwithstanding the ultra-puritanical attitude she assumed she was by no means a young lady (she was about twenty-seven at the time) indifferent to grace and good looks in the other sex, and gazing out of her window one day, lo and behold! there was the fascinating mountebank performing before her very door—another example, by the way, of Buckingham's daring. There seems no doubt that Mrs. Ireton had fallen in love with the Jack Pudding Duke. Be that as it may, she sent to him with the request that he would come and speak to her. Her husband, one supposes, was well out of the way. Buckingham, quite alive to the risk he was running, at first determined not to hazard it, but his habitual courage and love of adventure overrode wiser counsels, and he went, "considering with himself that in case he could enter into an amorous intrigue with the lady he might by this means be let into all the secrets of her husband, without whose advice Cromwell hardly undertook anything of moment." That very night, therefore, he

proceeded to Mrs. Ireton's abode, his mountebank's costume changed for a dress whose richness was discreetly hidden by a large cloak, and the only thing that concealed his identity being the piece of plaster or cloth over one eye, which he still thought it prudent to wear. However, "he met with a more kind reception than if he had had both his eyes entire." Indeed, the lady gave him such unequivocal proofs of her tenderness that he began to realise that he might declare himself without danger. But one thing stopped him—the person of his fair admirer itself coupled with the thought that she was the daughter of his arch-enemy, the Lord Protector. What to do? The lady's caresses became more and more endearing: Joseph in the presence of Potiphar's wife was not harder put to it to resist them. Buckingham was the very reverse of a Joseph, but perhaps he remembered the story, and the religion of the Biblical character may have given him a hint as to his procedure. In any case, in order to extricate himself from what was rapidly becoming an impossible position, he boldly told Mrs. Potiphar Ireton that he was a Jew and by the Judiac law forbidden to have carnal connection with a Christian woman. Horror and amazement seized the lady cheated out of her pleasure, and, one supposes, something like incredulity that one who was accustomed to play wild antics in public should develop a conscience

at the very threshold of delight. She evidently had doubts as to the truth of the incognito's assertion, but she at last let him go, on his promising to return the next evening. In the meanwhile she sent for a Jewish Rabbi (being herself n competent to confute or argue the matter), and when the Duke appeared he found himself to his amazement confronted with a grave and reverend signor armed at all points with the authority of the Talmud. But this was a work to which Buckingham had not given that close attention which would warrant his entering into a disputation on its innumerable laws and regulations ; and he therefore begged a couple of days' grace to consider and perpend the elder's arguments and assertions. It need hardly be said that before that period had elapsed he had thought it prudent to leave London, not however before he had indited a letter to his fair admirer in which he told her who he was, phrased in characteristically vivacious and witty terms. Mrs. Ireton perusing that document would form an interesting subject for an artist !

' Hudibras ' Butler has left us an amusing word-picture of the volatile Duke as he was at this period, as indeed he was all his life—for he was constant to nothing but inconstancy :—

" He rises, eats, goes to bed by the Julian account, long after all others that go by the new style, and keeps the same hours with owls and the

antipodes. He is a great observer of the Tartar customs, and never eats till the Great Cham, having dined, makes proclamation that all the world may go to dinner. He does not dwell in his house, but haunts it like an evil spirit, that walks all night to disturb the family, and never appears by day. He lives perpetually benighted, runs out of his life and loses his time as men do their ways in the dark : and as blind men are led by their dogs, so he is governed by some mean servant or other that relates to his pleasures. He is as inconstant as the moon which he lives under, and although he does nothing but advise with his pillow all day, he is as great a stranger to himself as he is to the rest of the world. His mind entertains all things that come and go ; but like guests and strangers they are not welcome if they stay long. This lays him open to all cheats, quacks, and impostors, who apply to every particular humour while it lasts, and afterwards vanish. He deforms nature, while he intends to adorn her, like Indians that hang Jewels in their lips and noses. His ears are perpetually drilling with a fiddlestick, and he endures pleasures with less patience than other men do their pains."

When Buckingham left London he made his way to the coast and succeeded in reaching France in safety. There he entered the service of the young Louis XIV, then in his teens, and taking part in the sieges both of Arras (1654)

and Valenciennes (1656), exhibited that bravery and resource which were two of his most serviceable characteristics.

It was while in exile that his fertile mind projected a scheme which on the face of it might well have seemed doomed to failure, but which his ingenuity crowned with success. This was no other than a match between himself and, of all people, Mary, the only daughter of Thomas, Lord Fairfax, the famous Parliamentary general. She was at this time (1653) but fifteen, and according to Madame Dunois possessed merit and virtue, but was small and thin. "Had she been, however, the most beautiful of her sex," proceeds the lady, "the being his (Buckingham's) wife would have been alone sufficient to have inspired him with dislike." This is to judge rather by the Duke's reputation than by actual facts. In any case she was not yet his wife, and he prosecuted his suit with the same ardour as he had undertaken the role of a mountebank and ventured into the dangerous proximity of Ireton's abode. There was a special and rather sordid reason for his anxiety to make Miss Fairfax a Duchess. When his property had been sequestrated a very considerable portion of it had been allotted to Lord Fairfax, and Buckingham thought that the best way of getting possession of it again was to marry the girl who, as her father's heiress, would eventually inherit it.

The scheme was a dangerous one, for it was of such a character as could not be carried out without its being known to, among other enemies, Cromwell himself, who would have had Buckingham executed or at least imprisoned without the slightest hesitation had he fallen into his hands. The Duke was reckless enough to talk about his project even before he started for England to put it into execution. For instance, General Massey received notice on June 19th, 1653, that the Duke had gone to Calais, on, as it was supposed, his journey to England. There were, however, wheels working within wheels on this occasion. For, although the Duke's presence was known (few things of this kind were likely to elude the vigilance of Cromwell's myrmidons), no attempt was made to interfere with his liberty. The fact is Fairfax was not averse from the match. He was indeed a distant connection of the Buckinghams, both being descended from the Manners family.

The Duke found some means—what they were it is not possible to say—to gain access to Fairfax, and was kindly received by a man who at least by birth and manners must have found his graceful and beautiful person a more fitting adjunct to the York House which had once belonged to the young man himself than the long-faced dour personages, so many of whom were conspicuous in the ranks of the Roundheads. Nor was

Buckingham's appearance and address less attractive to the young lady herself, and the result was that the marriage took place at Bolton Percy, a seat of Lord Fairfax in Yorkshire, on September 15th, 1657.

On learning of the marriage, Cromwell was furious. It is supposed that he had marked down the Duke as a possible husband for one of his own daughters, Mary (who later became the wife of Lord Fauconberg) perhaps, or the youngest, Frances. Some accounts state that through the influence of Fairfax a portion of the Duke's confiscated estates was restored to him, but it is more likely that his father-in-law, on whom much belonging to the Villiers had been bestowed, himself made this restitution. Cromwell certainly took a very different course—he issued immediate orders for the Duke's imprisonment in the Tower, and quarrelled bitterly with Fairfax over the incident. The latter at once demanded Buckingham's release, but the Protector was adamant and angrily refused to consider it.

An entry in the Council Books records Fairfax's Memorial, and in the Thurloe State Papers it is given as follows :—

"At the Council at Whitehall,

"Tuesday, 17th November, 1657.

"His Highness having communicated to the Council that the Lord Fairfax made address to him, with some desires on behalf of the Duke of

Buckingham : Ordered, that the resolves and Act of Parliament, in the case of the said Duke, be communicated to the Lord Fairfax, as the grounds of the Council's proceedings touching the said Duke ; and that there be withal signified to the Lord Fairfax, the Council's civil respects to his Lordship's own person. That the Earl of Mulgrave, the Lord Deputy Fleetwood, and the Lord Strickland, be desired to deliver a message from the Council to the Lord Fairfax, to the effect aforesaid.

Henry Scobell, Clerk of the Council."

This rigmarole merely indicates that the Council had great respect for my Lord Fairfax, but that they would see him further before granting his request.

As a matter of fact Buckingham was never liberated during Cromwell's lifetime ; and it was only during Richard Cromwell's short occupation of the Protectorship that he obtained the privilege of exchanging his prison in the Tower for that at Windsor. This change was to have a bearing on his character. Imprisoned at Windsor at this time was the poet, Abraham Cowley,* and he and the Duke, who had known each other at Trinity, Cambridge, renewed their friendship. It is not too much to suppose that during the long hours of imprisonment Cowley imbued Bucking-

* Buckingham remained a friend of Cowley's during the latter's life. After the poet's death his body lay in state at Wallingford House, and Buckingham set up a memorial to him.

ham with that love of poetry and the drama which he afterwards exhibited in many a light copy of verses and in that satiric masterpiece, *The Rehearsal.*

On the accession of Richard Cromwell fresh efforts were made for the Duke's release, and a few months before the Protector's abdication they were crowned with success, although not unconditionally, as may be seen in the following extract from a contemporary news-sheet :—

" February 21st, 1658/9.—The humble petition of George Duke of Buckingham, now prisoner at Windsor Castle, upon his engagement upon his honour at the bar of this House, and upon the engagement of Lord Fairfax, in twenty thousand pounds, that the said Duke shall peacefully demean himself for the future, and shall not join with or abet, or have any correspondence with, any of the enemies of the Lord Protector, and of this Commonwealth, in any of the parts beyond the sea or within this Commonwealth, shall be discharged of his imprisonment and restraint ; and that the Governor of Windsor Castle be required to bring the Duke of Buckingham to the bar of this House on Wednesday next, to engage his honour accordingly. Ordered, that the security of twenty thousand pounds to be given by the Lord Fairfax, on the behalf of the Duke of Buckingham, be taken in the name of his Highness, the Lord Protector."

On obtaining his release Buckingham went to live at the house of his father-in-law, at Nun Appleton. There, we are told, he "lived orderly and soberly with his wife." Had he continued to exhibit such traits of exemplary conduct he would not have found a place in this volume; for, in spite of his eccentricities, his obvious lack of balance, his essential waywardness of disposition, he had as yet done nothing to earn the title of rake. His masqueradings, unholy as they may have appeared to a morose and stiff-backed generation, were innocent enough, and were indeed assumed in order to enable him to observe how matters stood in the metropolis or with the design of getting in touch with his own people. He had shewn courage and resource in his military capacity, and the episode in which Mrs. Ireton figures was of her contriving and, as we have seen, his conduct if reckless was little more—certainly it compares favourably with that of the lady. With the Restoration, however, a change was to come over the spirit and habits of the volatile Duke, and from being the good boy of Nun Appleton he became in a moment the outstanding example of want of principle and profligacy in a Court at which both characteristics were paramount.

The Restoration brought some strange changes, but hardly one so strange as that which turned the domesticated husband into a wild and determined libertine.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM (*continued*).

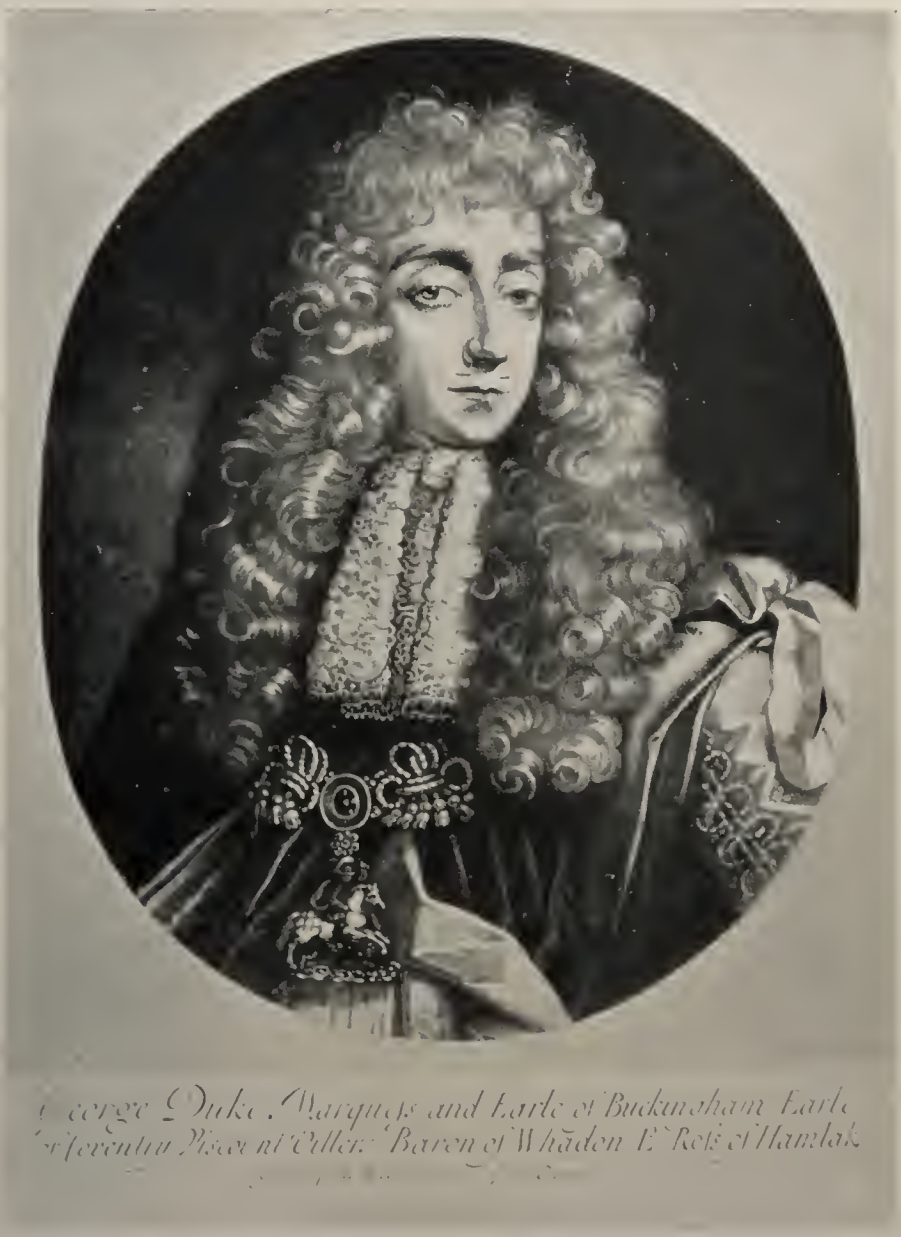
CHARLES II returned to his subjects amid a whirlwind of rejoicing. The English people, who had inwardly groaned under the strict rule of the Commonwealth, and to whom the essentially strong government of that party which had made the country feared abroad as it had not been feared since the days of Elizabeth, was a bugbear because it interfered with natural instincts and repressed with an iron hand the exhibition of natural passions, hailed with joy a change which was to alter such things. But Charles had at first a sufficiently difficult part to play. With the people among whom he again found himself his task was easy enough. His charm of manner, his gaiety and good nature, were sufficient to carry him over many a shoal, but he was surrounded by a crowd of self-seekers who at The Hague and at Breda and elsewhere had extracted all sorts of promises from him

when he should come to his own. Many of these promises, made idly perhaps and too hastily, he was not in a position to fulfil, and although he did his best and liberally rewarded all those who had risked their lives and fortunes in facilitating his various escapes, still the most insistent ones were those who had done little but partake of his bounty (what he had to give them), and swell the number of his exiled Court.

Of these Buckingham could not be said to be one. He had fought for the King, he had shared his privations and perplexities after Worcester, and he had, under most adverse conditions, kept his end up during the years that had elapsed since that disastrous day. He was, besides, as we have seen, an hereditary friend of the Royal Family, and had as a boy conned his lessons and played his games with his Master. That Master did not prove ungrateful to the memories of youth and early manhood. He made Buckingham a Lord of his Bedchamber, he created him a Privy Councillor, and later Master of the Horse and Lord Lieutenant of Yorkshire. He had as early as September, 1649, given him the Garter, and he was at later periods to shower ambassadorial and other honours on him. Buckingham had, of course, procured the restitution of all his vast estates at the Restoration, and Wallingford House became as notable for its splendour as it had been in the time of his magnificent father. Thus then

we have him in beauty, manners, riches, influence and power the foremost noble of his time. What use he made of his possessions and gifts will be seen.

At this period Buckingham was at the height of his reputation as a man of pleasure. The testimony of such contemporaries as came in contact with him prove that his appearance and manners were the most seductive. At the very beginning of his memoirs Sir John Reresby takes occasion to say that the Duke was the finest gentleman he thought he had ever seen, but, he adds, "he knew not how to be long serious, or mindful of business," and he hints, as does Grammont, at his having behaved rudely to Charles on the Continent, a circumstance which caused their separation but which the easy-going King seems to have forgiven and forgotten at the Restoration. Grammont thought that Buckingham considered himself more irresistible than he really was, but Madame Dunois voices what the fair sex probably thought of him in the following passage: "No man was handsomer, or more nicely made, and there was something so engaging in his conversation as made him more pleasing by his wit than by his person. His words pierced the heart, and he was born for gallantry and magnificence, in both of which he surpassed all the lords of the English Court." Dean Lockier once told Spence that "when he came into the



THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

presence-chamber, it was impossible for you not to follow him with your eye as he went along, he moved so gracefully;"* and even Burnet allows that he was a person of a noble presence.

One can well imagine what an asset such a man was to the gay Court of Charles II. His buffoonery, his quite remarkable powers of mimicry, his inexhaustible good-humour and wit, made him a leader among the joyous band that congregated at Whitehall. His good looks and *airs vainqueurs* played havoc with the frail beauties. One of these was the Miss Stewart for whose favours he discarded one of the Portuguese ladies who had come over with Queen Catherine. But that childish lady repulsed him so consistently that he was obliged to desist from his advances. Indeed, the Duke's name is not attached to any special object until, as we shall see, his intrigue with Lady Shrewsbury. The fact is he was too volatile to pursue a passion for long, and he seemed to have flitted from one fair lady to another without doing any particular harm, but with the inconstancy which was his main characteristic. His chief delight was to make people laugh, and with his histrionic gifts he had little difficulty in doing this.

Various tales are told of his pranks in this direction. For instance, there is the incident of the vain little Lady Muskerry who, although

* *Anecdotes of Men and Books.*

she was supposed to be in an interesting condition, as the phrase is, was so passionately fond of dancing and so anxious to make a figure at Court that she appeared there dressed in a farthingale which, it was supposed, she wore in order to find favour with the Queen, who affected this ungainly sort of habiliment. Grammont thus tells the *dénouement*: "In the midst of her capering in this indiscreet manner, her cushion came loose without her perceiving it, and fell to the ground in the very middle of the first round. The Duke of Buckingham, who watched her, took it up instantly, wrapped it up in his coat, and mimicking the cries of a new-born infant he went about inquiring for a nurse for the young Muskerry among the maids of honour."

There was no one too high-placed or too grave to escape the shafts of his ridicule: he mimicked the King to his face; he imitated the solemnity of Clarendon so that Charles almost died of laughter to see him with a pair of bellows hanging before him in imitation of the Purse, preceded by Colonel Titus bearing a shovel in place of the mace, passing statelily through the apartments with pursed lips and brows puckered—overwhelmed with the cares of office. There is little doubt that by a system of ridicule which communicated itself to the whole Court Buckingham gradually undermined the influence of the great Lord Chancellor and materially helped to bring about

his downfall. Charles, who would do anything for a laugh, forgot all he owed to his minister in his delight at the buffoonery of his favourite.

Granger records a scene in the very Chapel Royal itself when Buckingham did not hesitate to give rein to his mania for creating laughter. It appears that the preacher for the day was a young man whose native bashfulness was increased by the presence of the King and his irreverent courtiers. He wore as was the fashion black gloves, and as the beads of perspiration started on his nervous brow he unwittingly passed his hands across his face, and the dye of the gloves left marks, the appearance of which was ludicrous enough. In addition, he had chosen an unfortunate text: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Need it be said that Buckingham at once perceived the appositeness of the words to the visage of the divine, and burst into such a fit of laughter that it gradually communicated itself to the whole congregation, even His Majesty being unable to refrain from joining in the general hilarity?

Indeed nothing was sacred from the Duke's sense of the ridiculous, and if he did not hesitate to put a clergyman out of countenance he was as cruel to the players in the theatre who mouthed the bombast or uttered the banalities with which so many of the dramatic pieces of the day were filled, and which, as we shall see, he ridiculed so

ably and so unmercifully in *The Rehearsal*. The well-known instance of his readiness in this respect is recorded by Spence, who received it from Dean Lockier: "In one of Dryden's plays there was this line, which the actress endeavoured to speak in as moving and affecting a tone as she could :—

"*My wound is great—because it is so small,*"

and then paused, and looked very distressed. The Duke, who was in one of the boxes, rose immediately from his seat and added in a loud ridiculing tone of voice :

"*Then 'twould be greater, were it none at all,*"

which had such an effect on the audience, who before were not very well pleased with the play, that they hissed the poor woman off the stage, would never bear her appearance in the rest of her part, and as this was the second time only of its appearance, made Dryden lose his benefit night."

There was an obvious lack of fairness in making the actress the victim of the playwright's bombast, but Buckingham could never resist an opportunity of this kind. That his critical faculty was of the acutest was shown in a variety of recorded ways, but the best proof of it is that remarkable parody which under the name of *The Rehearsal* is perhaps more famous, and is certainly better known, at least by name, than are any of the plays it ridiculed. It has been called "one of the best pieces

of criticism that ever was," and although in these days so many if not all the plays it satirized are forgotten, it can be read with amusement on account of its native wit and humour.

It has never been pretended that Buckingham was its sole author: Martin Clifford, then Master of the Charterhouse, Samuel Butler, Sprat and others being known to have had a hand in it. But it is easy to see that the Duke was the leading spirit in its acute detection of the inconsistencies and obvious absurdities that so often abounded in the plays of the period, such as those of Stapylton, Howard, Killigrew, and such-like third and fourth rate dramatists and from which even the genius of much greater men, Dryden and Davenant for instance, were by no means free. To ridicule these rhyming, mouthing plays, and with not a little personality—after the common custom of the time—to attack their authors, were the chief objects of Buckingham and his coadjutors in writing *The Rehearsal.**

The play appeared at the close of the year 1671, and we find Evelyn going to see it on December 14th of that year: "Went to see the Duke of Buckingham's ridiculous farce and rhapsody called 'The Recital,'† buffooning all plays yet prophane enough." One would have

* See Introduction to Professor Arber's reprint of the play. This, with its ample notes and illustrations, its quotations from the plays ridiculed and its copious annotations, is by far the best edition of *The Rehearsal* extant.

† This is a mistake, of course, for *The Rehearsal.*

liked to have known Pepys's opinion of it, but unfortunately his diary closes before this date. Horace Walpole, referring to Dryden's portrait of the Duke as "Zimri," and the Duke's ridicule of Dryden's more turgid lines, acutely sums up the matter by saying: "Dryden satirized Buckingham; but Villiers made Dryden satirize himself."

Johnson, we know, had a very low opinion of the play. We can hardly imagine his being likely to relish anything of Buckingham's. Had it not been a satire on Dryden it would, he thought, have long been forgotten. A reference to it in one of his innumerable conversations—or monologues—enabled him to put in practice a habit of which he was very fond, namely, the turning of one of his own remarks from good Saxon to a latinized form of the same. Thus, of *The Rehearsal*, he once remarked: "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet"; and then, as if recollecting himself, "It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction."

Although the Duke's other literary excursions are not here exactly my theme, they should be at least noticed briefly, because they help to shew a side to his nature which his less reputable characteristics have somewhat obscured. In addition to *The Rehearsal* he wrote, or rather adapted from Fletcher, *The Chances*, which was frequently performed, although we are told that "the licentiousness of that nobleman's pen rendered

the play improper for representation" at a later period, and that Garrick bowdlerized it for eighteenth century consumption.* He also produced such now utterly forgotten pieces as *The Restoration, or Right will take Place,* a tragi-comedy, and *The Battle of Sedgemoor,* a satirical and political farce. In 1715 *The Works of His Grace George Villiers, late Duke of Buckingham,* were published, in which may be found such things as his *Short Discourse upon the Reasonableness of Men's having a Religion or Worship of God,* which had first appeared in 1685, together with an *olla podrida* of verses, translations, letters, and occasional pieces which make up the sum of his literary and dramatic achievements. Except by students of the period even their names are now forgotten, and as a 'noble author' he will go down to posterity as he has come down to us—as the writer of one incomparable piece of witty satire.

In spite of the splendid fortune which Buckingham had inherited from his father, and which although for a time alienated had again, as we have seen, come into his possession, his lavishness soon brought him into straits for want of ready money. He must have spent large sums in prosecuting as he did that mania for discovering the Philosopher's Stone, which has affected so

* Pepys saw it on April 27th, 1661, and again on February 5th, 1667, and found it "a good play." I am bound to add that the sight of Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Middleton on the latter occasion he found better still!

many minds; he took to building, so often a ruinous expedient in the case of amateurs; his hospitality, which was hardly short of royal; his magnificence in dress; his splendid presents; his gambling* and the rest, were sufficient to play havoc with the most princely fortune; and it is hardly surprising to find him obliged to sell the splendid York House, which was destined to be pulled down and its site covered by streets and buildings which to-day feebly perpetuate its former magnificence.

It has never been confirmed, however, that Buckingham was a desperate gambler, but there is no doubt he was at one time prominent in those games of basset which the Court of Charles II indulged in to pass the time. We know besides that it was over cards that, when in France, he had a serious quarrel with the Earl of Sandwich, which was only prevented from terminating in a duel through the interference of Queen Henrietta Maria and Lord St. Albans. His entertainments at Wallingford House to the King and Court were on a scale of such grandeur as must have deeply drained his purse, a purse which was further depleted by the inability of many of his tenants to pay their rents, thus throwing much land on his hands, according to Pepys to the then

* His gambling seems rather to have been the result of lack of money owing to his profuse expenditure than to an inborn passion, and when he found he lost more than he gained in this way, "he resolved to give it over, and ever after kept his resolution," Brian Fairfax tells us.

large amount of £6,000. Among other things he had his private band, and the Diarist, who was an authority on such matters, speaks of it as being "the best in town."

There is no doubt that financially matters had become very serious with Buckingham. But, as we have seen, he was a man of infinite resource, and his active mind visualised all sorts of projects to buttress his tottering fortunes. Among other expedients he established a glass manufactory at Lambeth, and Evelyn, who once visited it, tells us of this "glass-worke where they made huge vases of mettal as cleare, ponderous and thick as chrystal; also looking-glasses far larger and finer than any that come from Venice." One does not hear further concerning this excursion into commercial activity, and it is probable that by the time the thing was set going the Duke had got thoroughly tired of it.

About the same time there was a project of sending a considerable force, as auxiliaries, to Louis XIV, and Buckingham promptly applied for the command. However, Charles seems to have got out of the difficulty of appointing a man whom he knew perfectly well was unfitted for the post by prevailing on the French Government not to press for the men. The command of a force raised in England was indeed given him, but he only held it for a short time, and it is probable that in any case it was felt he could

not do much harm manœuvring on Blackheath, where the regiment was stationed. At an earlier time he had the audacity to ask for a ship during the war with Holland, in 1665. He had no naval training and was the most unsuitable of men for such a post. So he had to be content with a subordinate position on the flagship. Difficulties, not unnaturally, arose, and it was not long before he threw up this employment and returned to the more congenial atmosphere of Whitehall and Wallingford House.

Among Buckingham's innumerable projects was one which can be the less forgiven him since it was aimed at a master as friendly and indulgent as ever man had—it was, indeed, nothing less than high treason. Led away, it is supposed, by an idle mountebank posing as an astrologer, who foretold that he would one day be King, the Duke embarked in certain dark and sufficiently mysterious designs with the object of anticipating the prediction, and his nefarious projects becoming known a proclamation was issued for his arrest. The document can be read in *The London Gazette* for March 7th, 1667. When the Duke became aware that his proceedings were known and that a price was put on his head he fled to his house at Westhorp in Yorkshire, and it became the unpleasant duty of Sir John Reresby, one of his personal friends, and at that time High Sheriff of Yorkshire, to put forth the warrant publicly

in the district. "I confess," he writes pathetically in his *Memoirs*, "I was at a loss to know how to act in this matter between obligation of my office as sheriff and the respect I had for the duke: but the judges coming down to the assizes advised me by all means to proclaim it, which I did, and it for ever after lessened me in the esteem of that lord."

But the attempt to take him was frustrated largely owing to the activity and devotion of the Duchess, who in spite of his increasing depravity of manners and his unconcealed faithlessness, outrode the officers of justice, and by giving her husband timely warning enabled him to escape. Again we find Buckingham hiding in London and assuming his old disguises, and in them not improbably haunting the purlieus of Whitehall itself. Tiring, one supposes, of this existence after a few weeks, he one day, June 28th, 1667, dined* publicly "at Wadloe's, at the Sun Tavern behind the Royal Exchange, and being mighty merry sent word to the Lieutenant of the Tower that he would come to him as soon as he had dined."† He should by this time have become quite used to durance in this fortress, for not only did he spend much time there during the Commonwealth, but only the year before he and the Marquis of Dorchester had both been sent

* The then fashionable hour for dinner was twelve o'clock.

† Pepys.

there as a result of their unseemly brawl in the House of Lords, when Buckingham pulled off his brother peer's hat, "took him by the periwigg, and pulled it aside, and held him."

The incident sheds light on another facet of Buckingham's character, namely an intolerance of manner which occasionally burst through his general good-breeding and as such may well be here interpolated in Pepys' words. The Diarist had gone down to the House to see Lord Bellassis when he heard the details of the affair. "At a conference this morning (December 19th, 1666) between the two Houses about the business of the Canary Company, my Lord Buckingham leaning rudely over my Lord Marquis Dorchester, my Lord Dorchester removed his elbow. Duke of Buckingham asked him whether he was uneasy; Dorchester replied, yes, and that he durst not do this were he anywhere else: Buckingham replied, yes he would, and that he was a better man than himself. Dorchester said that he lyed. With this Buckingham struck off his hat and took him by the periwigg and pulled it aside, and held him. My Lord Chamberlain and others interposed, and upon coming into the House, the Lords did order them both to the Tower, whither they go this afternoon."

When Buckingham had first been sent to the Tower it was because he was a staunch supporter of the King; now he was imprisoned there as

a traitor. After a few days' detention he was brought before the Council and there examined in the presence of Charles himself. Towards his Master, we are told, he was submissive enough, but his manner towards the Chancellor and Lord Arlington was "most bitter, and sharp, and slighting." When the letter supposed to have been written by him to the astrologer to cast the King's nativity was produced, "Sir," he said, addressing Charles, "this is none of my hand, and I refer it to your Majesty whether you do not know this hand." The King answered that it was indeed none of his, and that he knew whose it was but could not recall it then. "Why," said the Duke, "it is my sister of Richmond's, some frolic of hers about some certain person; and there is nothing of the King's name in it, but it is only said to be his by supposition, as is said."*

Charles appears to have been satisfied with the answer and was probably glad enough for any excuse to exculpate his favourite from the charges brought against him—charges which he may have shrewdly guessed to have had no little political and personal rancour in them. However, the Duke was sent back to durance, and in spite of Charles's prepossession in his favour and the solicitations of Lady Castlemaine—who had one of her frequent quarrels with the King over the

* Pepys.

matter, they parting "with very foul words, the King calling her a jade that meddled with things she had nothing to do with at all, and she calling him a fool"—Buckingham was kept a close prisoner for a time. It is not improbable that the Duke's remark on this occasion to the effect that "a person has only to be committed to prison by my Lord Chancellor and my Lord Arlington, and there is little doubt of his becoming popular," was based on a thorough knowledge of the lack of popularity of his two enemies.

All this occurred in July, and there is little doubt that most people thought—it seems certain that Clarendon did—that the Duke's day, at least of favour at Court, was over. When, lo and behold! in the following September a proclamation appeared to this effect: "That His Majesty was graciously pleased to declare to his Council that upon the humble submission of the Duke of Buckingham, he had received him again into favour, and that it was the King's pleasure that he should be restored to his place in the Council and in the Bedchamber." Upon this Buckingham was immediately called in, and having kissed hands, took his place at the Council board accordingly. For how much he was indebted to Lady Castlemaine in this sudden change of affairs is a question which will not long agitate the minds of those who know anything of her relations with Charles. She was then paramount in his affections, and even

her marked partiality for Buckingham which, one would think, might have militated against her success as an intercessor, did not weigh with the King, if as the price of his rival's pardon he could once again enjoy his own gratification in her company.

Like many men who meddle with politics but who do not possess statesmanlike qualities, Buckingham shews worst when he attempted to interfere in the government of the country. His profligacy, his extravagance, his impetuosity and his arrogance, were largely to be put down to the fact that he was the spoiled darling of a reckless and libertine society and the boon companion of a careless, good-natured monarch. But when instead of amorous he mixed himself up with political intrigues, a darker shade is added to his character, and from being the light and merry buffoon of Whitehall, he degenerated into the conspirator and one of the leading spirits of the infamous Cabal. The doings of that notorious band of men, the initials of whose names formed the title of their ministry, do not here concern us, nor does Buckingham's association with them possess any special bearing on his conduct as a rake—unless it be a political rake. And so I leave the reader to more solemn annals should he wish to refresh his mind as to the doings of Charles's government in the hands of a set of unprincipled, opportunists after the disappearance

of his one really great statesman who was hurled from power through the machinations of a worthless woman and a feather-brained man.

We have seen how the precincts of the House of Lords did not prevent Buckingham from giving vent to his passionate and arrogant nature. A companion picture in which, however, the hothead appears to have had better reason for his act, occurred some time after at the Duke's playhouse. Pepys had the story from his friend Creed, and thus relates it: "Creed tells me of the fray between the Duke of Buckingham and Henry Killigrew, whom the Duke did soundly beat and take away his sword, and make a fool of, till the fellow prayed him to spare his life; and I am glad of it; for it seems in this business the Duke of Buckingham did carry himself very innocently and well, and I wish he had paid this fellow's coat well. I heard something of this at the 'Change to-day; and it is pretty to hear how people do speak kindly of the Duke of Buckingham, as one that will enquire into faults; and therefore they do mightily favour him."

This Killigrew, who was the son of the better-known Thomas Killigrew the playwright, was notorious, even among the many foul-mouthed, graceless-living crowd that congregated around Whitehall, for the obscenity of his talk and manners. Pepys elsewhere speaks of him as being as great a rogue as any in London, ready to catch

hold of every woman who came near him. It was probably in connection with some such impertinence, although no details are forthcoming, that he came in contact with the ducal cane on this occasion.

It may here conveniently be mentioned that this was not the last time this despicable person was to suffer chastisement at Buckingham's hands. One may summarise the details from Grammont's *Memoirs*, although there the story is given in rather a different version from that generally accepted. Suffice it to say that Killigrew had been singularly favoured by the notorious Lady Shrewsbury, and that in his cups, and he was not averse from the bottle by any means, he not only boasted of his success but indulged in such particular and intimate descriptions of the lady's charms and amorous conduct that the matter came to the ears of the Duke, who not long afterwards having declared himself her admirer, caused Killigrew to be dismissed from Court. The fury of the latter knew no bounds, and he went about showering abuse and invective against both Lady Shrewsbury and Buckingham. This he did so openly that the latter determined to make him smart for it. Accordingly he had him waylaid, Grammont says, in St. James's Park—other accounts state, as he was coming in a coach from Turnham Green. Wherever it was, he was dragged from the vehicle by a band of

hirelings headed by the Duke, Lady Shrewsbury watching the affray from a carriage, and so unmercifully handled that he is said to have received no fewer than nine rapier wounds besides being cudgelled and otherwise maltreated. A servant who was with him was actually killed, but the Duke afterwards told the King that things would not have gone so far had not Killigrew himself drawn his sword and rushed upon his assailants. A poor excuse, but one which in those days seems to have served.

The chastisement of a far greater man was at one time regarded as being due to Buckingham. Furious at the character which Dryden had drawn of him in *Absalom and Achitophel*, he is said to have hired some ruffians to waylay the poet. There seems little doubt that the Duke was quite innocent of this charge. At eight o'clock on the evening of December 16th, 1679, as Dryden was passing along Rose Street, Covent Garden, on his way from Will's, he was set upon by three hired bullies and severely beaten.* There is every reason to believe that it was Rochester and the Duchess of Portsmouth, who had been virulently attacked in a certain *Essay on Satire* not, by the way, written by Dryden at all,† who were the instigators of this outrage; and Buckingham, who had enough to answer for in other ways,

* See Luttrell's *Brief Narration of State Affairs*.

† Lord Mulgrave was the author.

can at least be held guiltless of this attack on the great poet. After all, *The Rehearsal* was a much more effective retort to *Zimri* than any amount of cudgelling could have been.

The Killigrew incident forms an appropriate prologue to the tragedy which was not long after to occur, and which of all his misdeeds is the one with which the Duke of Buckingham's name is most notoriously connected.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM—(*concluded*).

THE Countess of Shrewsbury, who figured as a spectator at the chastisement of Killigrew, was destined to be present while her husband was killed in a duel by her paramour. Pope, in some famous lines descriptive of Clivedon, the county seat of the Shrewsburys, speaks of "wanton Shrewsbury," and there is little doubt that to no woman of Charles's Court was the epithet more applicable.

This notorious creature was the daughter of Robert, Lord Brudenell, afterwards second Earl of Cardigan, and had been married, as his second wife, to Francis Talbot, eleventh Earl of Shrewsbury, in 1658. Grammont says of her that she was "less famous for her conquests than for the misfortunes she occasioned, and considered her chief merit to consist in being more capricious than any other. As no person could boast of being the only one in her favour, so no person could

complain of having been ill received." In which periphrasis we get the key to the lady's character. She was, indeed, one of those insatiable persons who seem to have introduced the habits of certain less reputable Roman empresses into the Court of Charles II. Her favoured lovers included the inevitable Harry Jermyn, the Earl of Arran, and Thomas Howard brother of Lord Carlisle, to whom may be added Henry Killigrew and the Duke of Buckingham. It is quite probable that there were others, but their names have not come down to us. It is, however, with the last that she seems to be most intimately connected, because of the scandalous association and tragic outcome of their intrigue.

The Duke had heard so much of Lady Shrewsbury's propensities, of her charm and complaisance, particularly from Henry Killigrew, who, as we have said, was continually boasting of his success, that, according to Grammont, he "at last resolved to examine into the truth of the matter himself: as soon as he had made the experiment he was satisfied, and though he fancied that fame did not exceed the truth, yet this intrigue began in such a manner that it was generally believed its duration would be short, considering the fickleness of both parties and the vivacity with which they engaged in it: nevertheless no amour in England ever continued so long."

The Earl of Shrewsbury seems for a considerable time to have been in blissful ignorance of the habits of his wife. Probably, as is frequently the case, he was the only person who was. However, at last even his eyes were opened, and without in any way reproaching the Countess he challenged Buckingham to a duel. The encounter took place at Barn Elms on January 16th, 1668, and as was then often the custom, each combatant was attended by two supporters who took part in the contest. The Duke's seconds were two of his friends, Sir Robert Holmes and Captain Jenkins; those of Lord Shrewsbury were Sir John Talbot, a kinsman, and Bernard Howard, a son of the Earl of Arundel. The whole six soon engaged in a desperate fight and all of them received wounds of a more or less serious character, Jenkins and the unfortunate Earl being so severely wounded that the former died almost immediately, the latter lingering on till the following 16th of March. The traditional story handed down by Pope to Spence is that "that impudent woman," as Evelyn calls the Countess, dressed in a page's clothes, held the Duke's horse during the encounter, and that her lover "slept with her that night, in his bloody shirt."*

It is a dangerous matter to upset pre-conceived convictions, especially when they possess a pictorial

* It would seem that the King had intimation of this duel and ordered the Duke of Albemarle to take steps to prevent it, but that through some misunderstanding nothing was done. See Pepys' *Diary*.

attribute. The picture of the countess trembling for her lover's safety and hoping for the death of her husband, dressed as a page and holding the horse, is an immoral one if you like, but there is an undeniable air of romance about it—sordid romance, but still romance. And, of course, it may all be true. But personally I regard many of such legends as open to the gravest doubt, and I have been unable to find any contemporary confirmation of this particular story ; even Pope, never friendly to Buckingham's memory, in his recollections as imparted to Spence only says that all the morning the countess was trembling for her gallant, although to be sure he does mention the incident of the " bloody shirt," with a " 'tis said," as a proviso.

Two months had hardly elapsed after this tragic sequel to a husband's attempt at obtaining justice for the wrong done him, than as great a wrong added to an open insult was done to the unoffending Duchess of Buckingham. The Duke had the effrontery to take Lady Shrewsbury to his own house, where his wife was then residing. The Duchess, who had hitherto put up with Buckingham's faithlessness and innumerable vagaries almost uncomplainingly, and who as we have seen succeeded in effecting his escape from the law-officers on a previous occasion, was at last roused. " Lady Shrewsbury and I cannot possibly live in the same house," she indignantly exclaimed.

"So I thought," calmly replied the Duke, "and I have therefore ordered your coach to convey you to your father." Pepys recording this does certainly not overstate the case when he terms the Duke's reply "a devilish speech." The fact is Buckingham was a devil, a clever, amusing, witty devil, and nothing shews so much the degradation of Charles than that he should have pardoned* a man, not necessarily for running away with somebody else's wife—that was so common as to be commonplace in those days—but for killing the husband in order to enjoy his ill-gotten gains undisturbed.

When Buckingham's mind was turned a certain way he was capable of any enormity, and rape and high treason were no more to him than dabbling in chemistry or playing the fiddle. Once he had the audacity to suggest to Charles the kidnapping of the Queen and the carrying of her off to one of the Colonies; but Charles, with all his faults and weaknesses, was not fundamentally bad, and he repulsed the idea with a horror which Buckingham was incapable of feeling.

Time seems only to have increased the Duke's vicious propensities. At an earlier day he had been content to make Charles and his courtiers laugh, and had thrown as decent a veil over his amorous intrigues as was consistent with the dissolute manners of Whitehall. Now he flaunted

* The pardon is to be found in the *Gazette* for February 24th, 1668.

his vices in the face of the world, and loved to shock more than amuse the jaded palates of the King and his *entourage*. Nothing was sacred to him, and it is recorded how, being at Newmarket with the Court on a certain Sunday, he must needs assume the garb and diction of a clergyman and make an obscene sermon before the King, based on certain passages in the Canticles.

Notwithstanding all this Buckingham was still a political power in the land, inasmuch as apart from his inclusion in the Cabal ministry he was supposed, and rightly, to possess extraordinary influence over the King. His power must, indeed, have been in this respect unlimited. As we have seen, he had been forgiven all sorts of things, from high treason downwards, and so omnipotent was he considered that the French Government made Lady Shrewsbury large gifts in order to secure her influence. The private despatches of this period reveal all manner of intrigues in this direction, and on one occasion Lady Shrewsbury is reported as saying that she would make Buckingham comply in all things with Charles's known leanings towards France—a leaning which had long since been bribed into being. This remark was probably uttered after the lady had received the £10,000 which Colbert, the French Ambassador, asserts that he gave her.

But although Charles and his Court were complacent enough over the scandal attaching

to Buckingham's connection with Lady Shrewsbury, the House of Lords did not view the matter so calmly, and when we are told by Reresby that "His Grace was called to the bar of the House of Peers for scandalously living with Lady Shrewsbury as man and wife, he being a married man, and for having killed my Lord Shrewsbury after he had debauched his wife," we may probably see in the circumstance the avenging hand of Lord Dorchester, who had endured ignominious treatment from Buckingham, as I have already recorded. Certainly the young Lord Shrewsbury personally seems to have taken no open steps to bring his father's enemy to justice, although his relatives presented a petition on the subject,* as according to a contemporary poem he is said to have continued to live under the same roof as his adulterous mother!

Whether the report that Buckingham was privately married to Lady Shrewsbury by his chaplain Sprat is true or not—and if it were, it would only have added to the Duke's other crimes that of bigamy—certain it is that they lived at Cliveden† and elsewhere as man and wife;

* See the Laing MSS.

† Waller was very friendly with Buckingham, and was often with the Duke at "princely" Clivedon. Once, too, we find him writing to his wife from his London lodging in St. James's Street, "next doore to the Sugar Loafe," that "The Duke of Buckingham with the Lady Sh(rewsbury) came hither last night at this time and carried me to the usuall place to supper, from whence I returned home at four o'clocke this morning, having been earnestly entreated to supp with them again tonight, but such howers can not be always kept, therefore I shall eat my 2 eggs alone and go to bedd."

and when the lady gave birth to a son Buckingham conferred on the child one of his own titles—that of Lord Coventry—and Charles consented to act as one of the godfathers! Well might grave men hold up their hands in horror at such a state of public morals.

I have before remarked that the favours showered on Buckingham by the King included ambassadorial honours. The first of these seems to have been in 1670, soon after the Cabal ministry was formed, and the embassy to Louis XIV's Court, of which the Duke was the chief figure,* had as much to do with the famous Triple League as it had with its ostensible purpose of condoling with the French monarch on the death of the Duchesse d'Orleans. In Paris Buckingham's fine manners and handsome person, as well as his wit, vivacity and liberality, made a great impression. Two years later he went on another embassy to Louis, who was then at Utrecht prosecuting his Dutch campaigns. On his way he stopped at The Hague to have an interview with the Prince of Orange. It was on this occasion that he is said to have remarked to the Prince that "we do not use Holland like a mistress, we love her like a wife," to which came the swift rejoinder, "Verily, I believe you love us as you love your own."

* Louis once said that Buckingham was the only English gentleman he had ever seen.

In 1674, in consequence of Buckingham's unpopularity, rather to be attributed to his political acts than to his private vagaries, he was forced to resign the office of Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, which had been conferred on him only three years before. That politics were the cause of this drastic act on the part of Cambridge seems to be proved by the fact that at the same time Buckingham was again in disgrace at Court, which he would hardly have been had his offence consisted of moral delinquencies only. How it came to pass that a man of the Duke's reputation and immoral way of life should have been elected to the headship of a great university, the majority of whose members, at least those who were capable of voting, were clergymen, would indeed be surprising did we not know that Buckingham organised the whole affair, as he organised so much in political life, and that, to use the words of Dr. Francis Turner writing to a friend, it " was carried as a race is won by a jockey, only by getting the start." It is certain that the Duke and his friends worked the matter so cleverly—in what devious ways will probably never be known—that the result was a unanimous casting of votes in his favour, and the amazing sight was seen of grave and reverend graduates of the University flocking to York House, where the ceremony of installation took place, to invest one of the most immoral men in the country as

the official chief of much of that country's piety and learning.

Well, in three years' time it had to be given up, but this was not the only sign of the Duke's loss of influence. Parliament had by now become heartily sick of the reckless policy of the Cabal; it began, too, to fear for the safety of the country in such hands as those of the unprincipled four (Clifford had died in the preceding year) on whom it looked as the authors of all the disasters and troubles which had beset the kingdom since their advent to power. Buckingham was called upon to explain his conduct, and although he did so with a mixture of frankness and cajolery, injured innocence and cryptic utterances, which might at an earlier day have proved effectual, the Commons now meant business, and a vote begging the King "to remove the said Duke of Buckingham from all his employments that are held during His Majesty's pleasure and from the Councils for ever," was passed.

The fall of Buckingham, for such it was, so far as his being a minister of the Crown was concerned, threw him into the arms of the opposition, of which he promptly became the leading spirit. But in trying to exculpate himself with the Commons he had betrayed so many State secrets that at last even Charles was furious with him for having, as he said, distorted all

sorts of things said at the Council Board, in order to try to justify his own actions.

Troubles now came crowding on the Duke. He had been stripped of his University distinction, he had been expelled from the Councils of his Sovereign, he had forfeited that Sovereign's much abused kindness. He was now to be arraigned by his Peers for his immoral conduct in the past—a large indictment, but curiously enough one in which the most heinous offence in the eyes of some of his accusers seems to have been the splendid funeral he had given to the child whom he called Lord Coventry but whose mother was Lady Shrewsbury, this accusation being brought against him by the trustees of the young Earl of Shrewsbury. After much acrimonious debate, for the Duke still had his supporters, he and Lady Shrewsbury were forced to separate, under a forfeit of £10,000 each to the Crown. The notorious countess withdrew for a time to a convent at Dunkirk, and two years later married Mr. George Bridges, after which rehabilitation she was once again received into the Queen's circle at Whitehall. The Duke recanted of his past misdemeanours to the Houses of Parliament, and to the wonder of all, as Pepys might have said, was seen the next Sunday attending service at St. Martin's in the Fields in the company of that long-suffering lady, his wife—quite in the manner of the reformed rake!

And for a time he seems to have been reformed. By great good luck the monetary ruin which had so long stared him in the face and which the loss of his high offices might well have completed, was for a time staved off, and he withdrew to Clivedon after inditing a long and abject letter to the King. That he was disgraced and greatly impoverished, although far from being utterly ruined, is certain, and he seems to have found solace in hunting and breeding carp, and indulging no doubt in all sorts of schemes and fancies which his active and restless brain was constantly contriving. In the midst of disaster it is interesting to find him frequenting, when engaged in hunting, a small inn—the White Hart—near his splendid seat at Burley, with which an amusing anecdote is connected. Mine host, who knew the Duke well and had become on terms of easy familiarity with him, was on one occasion desired by Buckingham to bring him some ale at once. "Your Grace is in a plaguey hurry," replied the man, "I'll come as soon as I have served my hogs." This so amused the Duke that he is said to have improvised these lines on the circumstance :—

"Some ale ! some ale ! " the impetuous Villiers cried ;
To whom the surly landlord thus replied—
"Plague on your Grace, you treat me as your dog,
I'll serve your Lordship when I've served my hog."

There is no doubt that the rural solitudes of Burley and Clivedon were the safest places for

Buckingham at this juncture of his affairs; and if he could have been content to remain in the country hunting or breeding carp or even indulging in his "folly," as he called his building mania* (as if his other innumerable pranks were not necessarily to be included in this category) he might have steered clear of further trouble—at least for a time. But he must needs return to London and take part with Lord Shaftesbury and others in supporting the moot point in Parliamentary procedure as to whether a Parliament that had been prorogued for more than a year was not by an old law automatically no longer existent. The Duke's speech is a remarkable example of his astuteness and his wit, his knowledge of the subject and his knowledge of human nature; but the House of Lords was hardly likely to hear with patience one who had in the past tried its patience so often, and who (so many of the peers must have felt) was the last man who should attempt to teach them political morals. Buckingham and his three supporters, Shaftesbury, Salisbury and Wharton, were ordered to be sent to the Tower. First, however, it was resolved that they should withdraw in order that an apology should be drafted. This was immediately done, but when the Duke was sent for in order that he should acknowledge his error in moving the dissolu-

* "He fell into a new way of expense in building in that sort of architecture which Cicero calls *Insanae substructiones*," says Brian Fairfax.

tion of Parliament, he was not to be found, and word was brought to the Peers that he had been seen muffled up and embarking in a small boat, by which he had reached the Temple and there gone off in a hackney coach. He was again doing what he had done ten years before, after the Dorchester incident. However, he seems to have thought better of trying to elude the vigilance of the authorities, and on the following day calmly walked into the House of Lords and was duly committed to the Tower. Another of his "submissions" took place, and after a few days' imprisonment he was set at liberty. Nell Gwynn pleaded his cause, and this, followed by some characteristic letters from Buckingham to the King, effected his release. That of Wharton and Salisbury followed, and Shaftesbury was alone left in durance. He had been known to describe Buckingham as "inconstant and giddy," and as the latter passed his window Shaftesbury, looking out, remarked: "What, my Lord, are you going to leave us?" To which the Duke replied: "Yes, my Lord, such giddy fellows as I can never stay long in a place."

From the Tower Buckingham went to Lord Rochester's lodgings at Whitehall for a few days, during which he had a private audience of Charles. But the King, ready as he was to receive again his old favourite, was beset by that favourite's enemies, and, probably at the instance of the Duke

of York, always inimical to him, and Danby, a political opponent, he was advised to leave the palace at the very moment when a complete reconciliation with his royal master seemed imminent.

The reformed rake not infrequently takes refuge in religion, and Buckingham was no exception to the almost general rule ; but he added to it a recrudescence of his interest in those dangerous forms of politics which have for their ostensible ends the amelioration of the kingdom. That the Duke had turned *dévot*, or pretended to have done so, is curiously illustrated by a letter from Lady Sunderland to Lord Halifax written in 1680. " The Duke of Buckingham very lately pretended to have some trouble of conscience," we are told, " and talked of it to some fanatics ; and they said he appeared to be in a good mind, and they were to come to him again to finish the work : at the time appointed he could not be found ; and afterwards they heard he was with a wench all that day." So much for good resolutions.

In the meanwhile he was still intriguing with the French Court ; he had his share in the so-called Popish Plot, in the Meal-Tub Plot, and in the many attempts made to discredit the Papists in England at this period. Indeed, the Duke's zealous fervour was as much political as religious, probably a good deal more so ; and in his excur-

sions into such-like intrigues his hatred of the Duke of York and his party was responsible for as much as his solicitude for the Crown and the "official" religion of the country. Butler, in his severe estimate of Buckingham's character, remarked that "continual wine, women and music had debauched the Duke's understanding;" and there is little doubt that temperamental excess induced by such causes was the spring which actuated much of Buckingham's restless dabbling in political intrigue, as well as his sudden religious fervour. From the former he seems to have definitely withdrawn on the death of Shaftesbury in 1683; the latter was curiously illustrated by *A Short Discourse upon the Reasonableness of Men's having a Religion or Worship of God*, which appeared, to the wonder of all, in 1685. There seems no reason to doubt that he was sincere in his protestations, and that the religious fervour which at this time began again to make itself felt had communicated its infection to one always open to new impressions and ready to fight tooth and nail for some fresh idea.

Baxter once said of Buckingham that although he "was of no religion but notoriously and professedly lustful, yet he was of greater wits and parts and sounder principles as to the interest of humanity and common good than most lords in the Court;" and this judgment is in the main an accurate one. Buckingham could by

conviction persuade himself to be a theologian with the same ease as he was naturally a rake and a profligate, and that he was the latter even his apologists have never been able to deny. But it was often the case of the dog with a bad name. Having such a reputation, his excesses, frequent as they were, were often exaggerated. Brian Fairfax, his first biographer and so friendly a one that where it is possible to find excuses for Buckingham he does so, has this passage in his *Life* of the Duke which illustrates what I mean and at the same time does not attempt to gloss over his profligacy: "His amours were too notorious to be concealed, and too scandalous to be justified by saying he was bred in the latitude of foreign climates and now lived in a vicious age and court, where his accusers of this crime were as guilty as himself. He lay under so ill a name for this, that whenever he was shut up in his chamber, as he loved to be, *nescio quid*, or in his laboratory, *meditans purgarum*, over the fumes of charcoal, he was said to be with women." *

The accession of James II was the signal for the Duke to seek still greater retirement. Among the list of Buckingham's works collected by Horace Walpole in his *Royal and Noble Authors*, appears *An Account of a Conference between the Duke and Father Fitzgerald, whom King James*

* Among the various accounts of Buckingham's career the latest and most authoritative is that by Winifred, Lady Burghclere, published by Mr. John Murray in 1903.

sent to convert His Grace in his sickness. This humorous and indecent effusion was the result of James II's wish to try to bring his old enemy over to his own faith, an incident which shews that the King's political animosity had been forgotten in his proselytizing zeal. Indeed, James acted liberally enough with Buckingham by not only leaving him in peaceful possession of his rural retirement, but also by evincing so much anxiety for the state of his soul.

Buckingham was now living at Castle Helmsly, an estate he had inherited from his mother, and here (Burley on the Hill had been sold to Lord Nottingham) he threw himself with characteristic and unabated ardour into the pleasures of the chase. He kept a pack of foxhounds, and in Yorkshire there is a hunting song which attests his success in this direction :—

> "Oh! with the Duke of Buckingham
> And other noble gentlemen,
> Oh! but we had some fine hunting."

Many of those who had known the Duke in his urban splendour and who could never have realised his true character were amazed at this change of interests, and Etheredge voices such sentiments in a letter he wrote Buckingham from Ratisbon in 1686. The Duke's reply is quite in the manner of one who had anticipated Voltaire's famous phrase, and who, like the Latin poet, thought

the best of life was to be found in the retirement of his Sabine farm.

It was on one of his hunting excursions that Buckingham caught a chill. He had put up at the inn at Kirby Moorside, and so rapidly did a fever supervene that his removal to his own house, to which he desired to be taken, was out of the question. Pope's famous description of his last hours is as over-drawn and inaccurate as is the statement made by Lockier that "he died between two common girls at a little ale-house in Yorkshire." Lord Arran, his cousin, happening to be in the neighbourhood and hearing of his condition, went immediately to him, and has left in a letter to Dr. Sprat, dated April 17th (the day after the Duke's decease), 1687, a vivid account of his last illness. This account (which is among the Ellis Correspondence) is confirmed by another from Mr. Gibson, one of the Duke's servants, who was also present during his last moments, while there is extant a letter from Buckingham himself to Dr. Barrow which breathes the very essence of regret and despair, and closes with the pathetic words, "Come and pray for the departing spirit of the poor unhappy Buckingham." Lord Arran had caused a clergyman to be fetched. "What is your Grace's religion?" he asked. "It is an insignificant question," replied the dying man, "for I have been a shame and disgrace to all religions; if you can do me any good, do."

It does not require the antithesis of Pope, or the insinuations of Dean Lockier, to deepen the contrast between what such a life might have been and what it was. In Dryden's hackneyed lines the character of Buckingham is summed up. He was born with all the advantages which so many hope for in vain, and he prostituted them all. He fell on a bad time. He met, at a critical moment, the most profligate of women; he married unwisely; he had no children. So that in spite of great parts, a handsome person, boundless wealth, much wit and infinite humour, and good manners, he comes down to us in memory so poor a thing that Nature may well stand aghast at what she meant to do and what through perversity and lack of character in her model she succeeded in doing. If ever a man lived who pointed a moral, it was the second and last George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

JOHN WILMOT,
EARL OF ROCHESTER.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARL OF ROCHESTER.

OF all the rakes who graced, or disgraced, the Court of Charles II, Rochester is generally regarded as the most outstanding and the most notorious. His name alone seems capable of conjuring up visions of unlimited profligacy ; and although Buckingham and Dorset, Etheredge and Sedley, were in this respect as bad, yet none of them has come down to us with quite the reputation for being such a *mauvais sujet* as the graceful and witty poet whose hard-worn character has been subjected to such drastic treatment as to leave it a mere thing of shreds and patches. Rochester's life lasted for but thirty-two years, and there is little doubt that into that portion of it—some fourteen years—which he passed at the Court of Charles II he managed to crowd as many experiences as it would take the ordinary man double the time to do. But he was no ordinary man, nor were his times

ordinary times. He cannot at any rate be said to have grown old although he was mature in vice; and he has this in common with Buckingham, that disorderly as was his life, its close was edifying; and if his career as a whole was an awful example, its final scenes were sufficiently praiseworthy to earn the commendation of a very stern critic. Indeed, Burnet's *Life and Death of the Earl of Rochester* is in the nature of a tract—at least Dr. Johnson's praise is sufficient to place it in such a category; and if the most profound truths and the most pious utterances may well be formulated on subjects the reverse of reverend or pious, there is at least this to be said: that without such examples there would be no necessity for such effusions; and given that such effusions are valuable for the world at large, a kind of *raison d'être* is established for the existence of rakes.

Let this, then, be Rochester's justification and excuse: that he, like so many of his gay and thoughtless contemporaries, both pointed a moral and adorned a tale: the tale as it is unfolded in the sparkling utterances of Grammont and such-like chroniclers; the moral as it is emphasised in the weighty periods of the Bishop of Salisbury.

Prefixed to one of the many editions of Rochester's poems, that published by the notorious Curll in 1709, there is an account of the writer in the form of a letter from St. Evremond to the

Duchesse de Mazarine. In this effusion the witty French philosopher gracefully glosses over such facts as are least reputable in the career of the poet, although he tells his fair friend one or two anecdotes which will seem strange enough to our more sensitive ears. Inasmuch, however, as St. Evremond knew Rochester personally and was intimately acquainted with most things that happened at the Court of Charles II, his notice of the "noble and beautiful Count," as Anthony à Wood, with the enthusiasm of a cavalier, calls him, possesses distinct value, although St. Evremond should be regarded rather as holding a brief for the defence than as an impartial judge.

Horace Walpole, on the other hand, is a directly adverse critic, and he prefaces his list of Rochester's works by one of those allocutions which contain a certain amount of truth but which are also unfair by that unfairest of all methods—implication. "A man," he calls him, "whom the Muses were fond to inspire and ashamed to avow, and who practised without the least reserve that secret which can make verses more read for their defects than for their merits. The art is neither commendable nor difficult. Moralists proclaim loudly that there is no wit in indecency. It is very true. Indecency is far from conferring wit; but it does not destroy it neither. Lord Rochester's poems have much more obscenity than wit, more wit than poetry, more poetry than politeness," and

he proceeds to give us his view of the surroundings amid which Rochester's verse flourished: "One is amazed at hearing the age of Charles the Second called polite;" he remarks, "because the Presbyterians and Religionists had affected to call every thing by a scripture-name, the new Court affected to call every thing by its own name. That Court had no pretensions to politeness, but by its resemblance to another age which called its own grossness polite, the age of Aristophanes. Would a Scythian have been civilized by the Athenian stage, or a Hottentot by the Drawing-room of Charles the Second? The Characters and anecdotes being forgot, the state-poems of that time are a heap of senseless ribaldry, scarcely in rhyme, and more seldom in metre. When Satyrs were brought to Court, no wonder the Graces would not trust themselves there."

It is easy to be severe on other times and other manners, and Horace, were he alive now, would be surprised, and one doubts not a little ruffled, were he to know what we from our removed standpoint think of the Court of the earlier Georges, not a few anecdotes of which compare fully in grossness with that of the earlier days he reprobates. To judge morals is as easy as throwing stones. But there are, after all, two ways of doing the lapideous jactation (as Sir Thomas Browne might have phrased it); and so to estimate the morality of a bygone age one must

not judge it by one's own; for were this not so one would be as wrong in saying a word (and yet how many a word is said!) about the dull decorum of the early Victorian era, as in censuring the licence of the period when grave people like Evelyn could write things which to-day would be unprintable, and philosophers like St. Evremond gloss over circumstances at which we, more conventionally, do not care to hint.

Let us then take the period as it was, not as the London County Council of to-day would (and quite properly) have it. It was one of extraordinary licence in word, in deed, and in thought. It was the outcome of an earlier phase when artificial restrictions were attempted to be placed on all three. This unnatural attempt to curb natural propensities formed probably the most artificial period through which our national life has passed. It did not say: "I will be good," so much as "I won't be bad;" it possessed the fear of temptation to the extent of for ever removing the chances of temptation; it was righteous by Act of Parliament; human nature was dragooned into perfectability. If it was not too good to be true, and there are plenty of instances which prove this—amiable Mrs. Ireton's for one, as we have seen—it was certainly too good to last. And it did not last. The trouble, of course, is that not only did it not last, but that

the revulsion which followed swung the pendulum to the other extreme.

The new era, as Walpole has obligingly told us, called everything by its own name. Now that is the whole trouble about this golden age: it was not content merely to do unspeakable things, it so delighted in them that it began to talk about them, and, what was far worse, it began to write about them. They did very much the same in Greece and Rome at certain well-known periods; they did it in France during the *ancien régime*. The consequence is that those eras have come down to us with all their indecency and immorality on their heads, because some of their protagonists thought fit (it was, of course, most injudicious and most reprehensible) to tell succeeding generations what they had been up to. The earlier forms of this self-revelation are known to us as "Classics," and an alien language has prevented their doing what harm they might be supposed capable of among a people not notable for their linguistic attainments. Something, though in a lesser degree, may be said of the Court of Louis XV. But with that of Charles II no such barrier exists, and anyone who cares may read Grammont's revelations or Rochester's poems until he can easily come to believe that there was hardly an honourable man or a virtuous woman to be found during the period known to us as that of the Restoration. How mad and bad

and sad it all was! But then—well, I suppose it was only when the kissing had to stop that it was realised how in that instant, as the world's age is gauged, much would have been better left undone; how many gifts had been prostituted, how many regrets were the crop from that careless sowing. Many of the men who sowed these tares of sin repented, not in an old age when, the passions subdued, repentance can be easy, but in what should have been their heyday; and Rochester at thirty-two with his dying breath desired that those among his works which were against decency and public morals should be destroyed, and laying his hand on the Bible exclaimed: "This is the true philosophy." When the author of *On Nothing* (which, it should be remembered, the somewhat austere Addison found it in his heart to call "an admirable poem") is condemned, let it be recalled that it was to such an age that he found himself born, and from such an environment that he passed so early to his grave.

John Wilmot was the second son of that ardent royalist, Henry, Lord Wilmot, who was later to become first Earl of Rochester of this creation, and who shared Charles's perils after the defeat at Worcester. He had married Anne, eldest daughter of Sir John St. John of Lydiard-Tregoze, Wiltshire, who at the time was the widow of Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley. This lady was a

relative of Lady Castlemaine, so that there were certain ties of consanguinity between the most notorious of Charles II's mistresses and the most daring and profligate of his courtiers.

There is some doubt as to the exact date of Wilmot's birth. It is given officially as April 10th, 1648 ; but Gladbury, the astrologer and almanack-maker, places it a year earlier, to be precise, on April 1st, 1647, on the authority of Wilmot himself. St. Evremond certainly favoured the later date, for in his account he remarks that the year 1648 was notable for two events : the execution of Charles I and the birth of Lord Rochester. But St. Evremond is not to be relied on in the matter of dates, for he further states that Rochester (as it will be convenient now to call him) succeeded his father in the earldom when but nine years of age. As, however, the first Earl died in 1659 his son must have been at least eleven when that event took place. However this may be, the boy was born at Ditchley, which was probably brought by Lady Lee as part of her jointure when she married *en seconds noces*.

He was first put to school at picturesque little Burford, whence he proceeded, according to St. Evremond, to Wadham College, Oxford, at the extraordinarily early age of eleven.* It must

* The present Warden of Wadham has very kindly looked up the matter and informs me that Rochester's caution money was paid on March 1st, 1660. The Rev. R. B. Gardiner, in his printed *Register of the College*, says 1659, but Mr. Wilkins points out that as the money was received by Ironside as Bursar, and as he only entered on that office

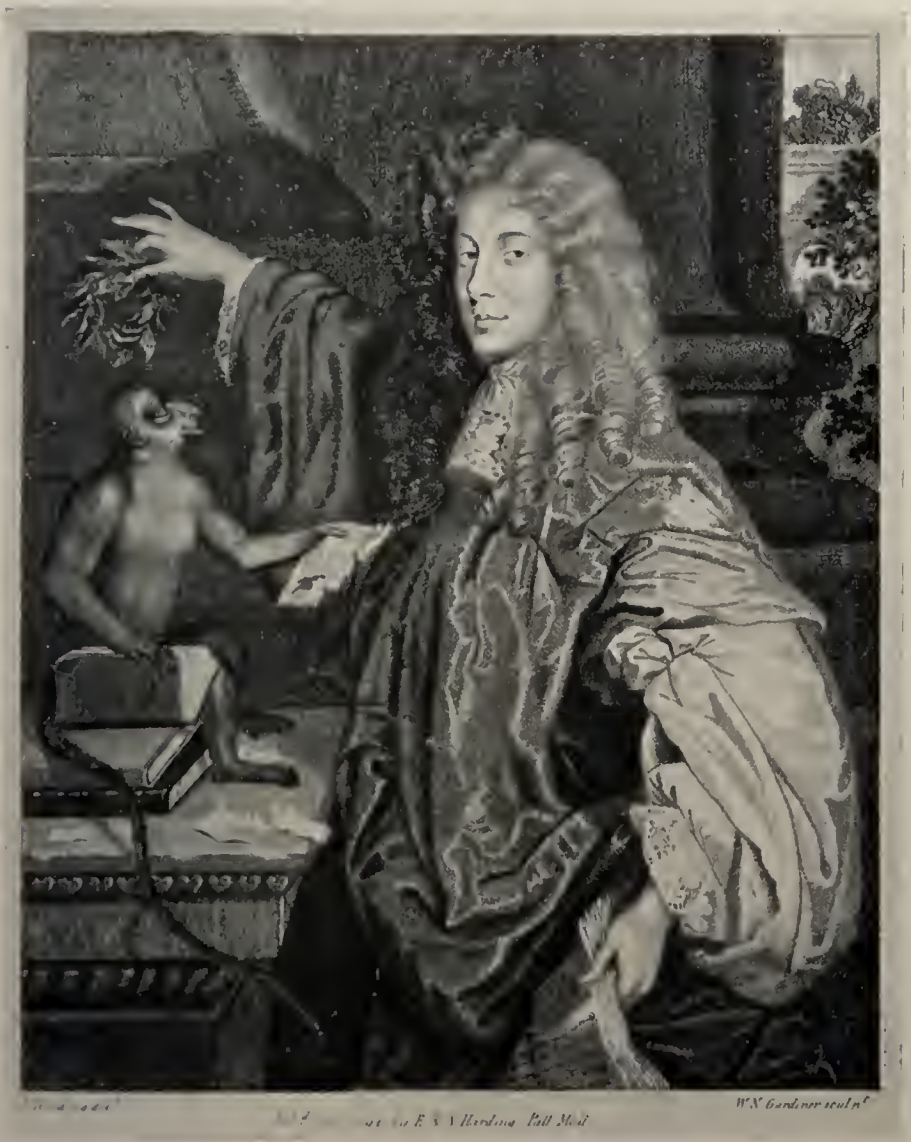
therefore have been while at the University that he succeeded to the title. Nothing is known of his life at Oxford; at such a tender age there could have been little to know, but inasmuch as he is said to have "there first sucked from his mother, the University, those perfections of wit, eloquence, and poetry which afterwards by his own corrupt stomach were turned into poison by himself and others," we may surmise that his Oxford days were not unproductive. He is said to have taken his M.A. degree when but thirteen; so that although his life was short he was so precocious as to give it the potentialities of a considerably longer span.

Leaving Oxford, Rochester set out on the Grand Tour, during which period of his existence he spent a considerable time at the Court of Louis XIV, where we may be sure he learnt better manners than he did morals. He came back to England loaded with a curious knowledge of the ancient classics, a quite commendable acquaintance with modern writers, a mastery of French and Italian, and an inordinate passion for drink. One can imagine nothing more likely to lead to ultimate disaster than an apprehensive and agile mind and intellect (such as his) excited by the indecencies of Aristophanes and Ovid,

on December 6th, 1659, this cannot be correct. The caution money was returned on January 23rd, 1661, so that his stay at the University was a short one. Before leaving he made a gift of plate, as did Sedley, we shall see, to his College.

and inflamed by the uses of strong waters—and disaster in due course followed. His introduction to the Court of Charles II, where his handsome face and graceful manners, his wit, and at first a certain modesty of bearing and ingenuousness of manner, gave him ready access and a warm welcome, completed his downfall. Charles was delighted with him, and not only officially marked his favour by creating him a Gentleman of the Bedchamber and Comptroller of Woodstock Park, but shewed his partiality privately by inviting him constantly to those entertainments *en petit comité* which were held in the King's own apartments or in those of his various mistresses. There was something alluring to the jaded rakes and courtesans of the period in completing the seduction of one so handsome and so youthful, who shewed himself at the same time an apt and willing pupil. It was not long before the student of immorality out-distanced his teachers and became the most finished product of a dissolute environment.

Burnet has drawn the character of Rochester as it was when Whitehall had done its worst with him. "He was," says the Bishop, "naturally modest till the Court corrupted him. His wit had in it a peculiar brightness to which none could ever arrive. He gave himself up to all sorts of extravagance and to the wildest frolicks that a wanton wit could devise. . . . . He was for some years always drunk and was for ever doing



THE EARL OF ROCHESTER.

some mischief. The King loved his company for the diversion it afforded better than his person. And there was no love lost between them. He took his revenges in many libels. He found out a footman that knew all the Court, and he furnished him with a red coat and a musket as a sentinel and kept him all the winter long every night at the doors of such ladies as he believed might be in intrigues. In the Court a sentinel is little minded and is believed to be posted by a Captain of the Guards to hinder a combat. So this man saw who walked about and visited at forbidden hours. By this means Lord Rochester made many discoveries. And when he was well furnished with materials he used to retire into the country for a month or two to write libels. Once, being drunk, he intended to give the King a libel that he had writ on some ladies : but by mistake he gave him one written on himself."

The incidents here recorded rather anticipate events, for not yet was Rochester so vitiated. Indeed, he had not been long at Court before he joined that happy-go-lucky band of young courtiers which went with the Earl of Sandwich in the expedition against the Dutch fleet. The vessel in which he was a volunteer was the " Revenge," and in an action with the enemy off the coast of Norway he exhibited that reckless gallantry which was one of the better parts of his complex personality. During the following year he was still

with the fleet and again distinguished himself in that long and indecisive action of June 1st, 1666, and following days, in which so many of his companions were killed or desperately wounded, but from which he escaped unhurt. Pepys has much to say about the affair, but here it only interests us indirectly as being the last occasion on which Rochester was to shew that underlying valour in his temperament which soon became deadened by a return to sybaritic pleasures. At first, however, even his gay and irresponsible character was sobered by what he had gone through, and for a short time after his coming back from the fleet he appears to have lived more or less temperately and even to have expressed regret for his past irregularities.

The change was, however, but a temporary one, and before long he was again the centre of Court intrigues, a profligate who as a poet was not averse from reprehending profligacy in others. This curious habit of castigating even those that partook of his pleasures was a double-edged weapon which Rochester frequently found to possess the properties of the boomerang. It made him feared; it was no doubt the chief reason for Burnet's assertion that there was no love lost between him and the King. It had sometimes more serious results: if a libel appeared, such was Rochester's reputation that it was at once put down to him—often correctly, sometimes other-

wise, and the quarrel between him and the Earl of Mulgrave seems to have arisen through a mistake of this kind. The Earl believed that a certain libel directed against himself was the handiwork of Rochester. Every person at Court was anxious, Grammont tells us, to obtain even the most insignificant trifles that came from his pen, and no doubt there were plenty besides Lord Mulgrave who thought the libel in question one of them. Be this as it may, a challenge was promptly carried to the supposed author, who denied being the culpable party. Mulgrave, however, was not so to be put off and demanded a meeting to settle the dispute. The negotiations were long, but it was at last settled that the two should meet on horseback, each accompanied by a friend who would be ready to join in the affray. The next day Rochester arrived at the rendezvous, but, to the astonishment of his enemy, not accompanied by a friend, but by a lifeguardsman of Herculean physique, and, besides, mounted so well as obviously to give him a marked superiority in the coming contest. After expostulations it was finally agreed that the encounter should be on foot. On their way to a suitable spot, however, Rochester told Mulgrave that he was suffering from some mysterious disease that made fighting a mere farce. There was nothing for it under these circumstances but to call the matter off. But it need hardly be said that Rochester's

reputation suffered grievously, and it was generally believed and openly expressed that not inability but fear was the cause of his excuse. The fact is that his constitution had become so undermined from continual drinking that the undoubted courage he once possessed had taken wings and had left him in that state in which he was ready to incur the charge of poltroonery and was indifferent enough not even to resent or contradict it.*

But if wine had thus deprived him of one means of attack or defence, he still possessed another which made him feared—his ability to write brilliant and biting satires on all and sundry. There was a certain Miss Price, famous in the annals of Whitehall rather for her wit and complaisance than for her actual beauty. She had, very indiscreetly for herself, quarrelled with a certain girl with whom Rochester was *au mieux*. Nobody was aware of the *liaison* until Miss Price in a fit of temper made it known. From that day onwards she was the victim of countless pasquinades, songs and ribald stories which were circulated about her by the furious Rochester with an assiduity worthy of a better cause. The jealousy of Lord Chesterfield was, from the point

* Rochester was lucky in these matters. In a news-sheet for March 25th, 1673, we read that "a duel between the Earl of Rochester and Lord Dunbar has been prevented by the timely intervention of the Earl Marshal." The sceptic might wonder if the Earl Marshal's attention had not been purposely drawn to the intended encounter by My Lord Rochester himself.

of view then obtaining at Court, a more legitimate subject for satire, and certainly Sedley and Etheredge and other wits exposed him in numberless ballads as much as did the redoubtable Rochester; nor was Miss Hobart's peculiar *penchant*—one not generally prevalent at the English Court—one which could legitimately be regarded as shielding her from the Earl's witty invective, and he probably did some good in extricating Miss Bagot from the lady's too friendly embraces.

It is Miss Hobart who figures so largely in a long story told by Grammont. She attempted to divert the attention of a certain Miss Temple from Rochester, but this was a dangerous game to play with so resourceful a person. There was a Miss Sarah (Grammont gives no other name) who was a faithful spy of Rochester's and who reported to him all that passed between the two young ladies, with the result that by the help of Henry Killigrew he so opened the eyes of Miss Temple and frightened Miss Hobart that had it not been for certain high influence the latter would have been banished from Court. Miss Temple in an access of gratitude, and not grasping Rochester's real character, clothed as it had been under the garb of the candid friend, was ready to make amends for the rigour with which she had under Miss Hobart's influence treated him, and not apparently realising to what

in the hands of a man of his character this *volte face* would be likely to lead. She was saved by a circumstance that, according to Grammont, was of annual occurrence. This was the expulsion of Rochester from Court: "Ever since he had first appeared there," we are told by the garrulous Frenchman, "he seldom failed being banished from it at least once in the year; for whenever a word presented itself to his pen or to his tongue he immediately committed it to paper, or produced it in conversation, without any manner of regard to the consequences: the ministers, the mistresses, and even the King himself were frequently the subjects of his sarcasms; and had not the prince whom he thus treated been possessed of one of the most forgiving and gentle tempers, his first disgrace had certainly been his last."

Rochester left London for the country, but not alone. He took with him the lady who figures in Grammont's pages as governess to the Maids of Honour, and her niece who, there is little doubt, was the Mrs. Barry with whom he had an intrigue, the fruit of which was a daughter, often mentioned in his letters. This Mrs. (we should now write Miss—but in those days this title had an unsavoury significance) Barry was certainly introduced to the stage by Rochester, and although at first meeting with little success, she eventually became famous (Dryden speaks of her as "always excellent" in his

preface to his play *Cleomenes*), and Cibber records her dignity, her majestic manner and her grace.

In due course Rochester was again received at Court, only, on the production of some fresh verbal or written outrage, to be again dismissed. Charles was no doubt willing enough to amuse his Court with the story of how Rochester had had his clothes stolen "while he was with a wench, and all his gold gone, but his clothes found afterwards stuffed in a feather bed by the wench that stole them"—a silly discourse, as Pepys calls it; but he could hardly have seen the same chartered libertine boxing Tom Killigrew's ears, in the very presence, without some feeling of annoyance; although so reliant was he on the witty fellow's company that even this did not openly affect his friendly attitude to the favourite, and it was only a day or so later that Pepys saw him "as free as ever with Rochester . . . . to the King's everlasting shame to have so idle a rogue his companion," adds the outraged diarist. We may take it that it was on this occasion that he took up his abode in the City, where he became friendly with all sorts of people, from civic dignitaries to persons on the lowest rung of the social ladder. His adaptability was such that he was hail-fellow-well-met with everyone, and, debarred for a time from the companionship of the highest in the land, made himself perfectly happy

drinking and hobnobbing with the lowliest of that monarch's subjects.

Grammont gives us a vignette of Rochester as a citizen and hints at one of the reasons for his conforming so easily with the manners and customs east of Temple Bar, as well as why he was received so enthusiastically by the denizens of those regions :—

" He took up his habitation in the city among the capital tradesmen and rich merchants, where politeness indeed is not so much cultivated as at Court, but where pleasure, luxury, and abundance reign with less confusion and more sincerity. His first design was only to be initiated into the mysteries of those fortunate and happy inhabitants, that is to say by changing his name and dress to gain admittance to their feasts and entertainments, and, as occasion offered, to those of their loving spouses : as he was able to adapt himself to all capacities and humours he soon deeply insinuated himself into the esteem of the substantial wealthy aldermen, and into the affections of their more delicate, magnificent and tender ladies : he made one in all their feasts, and at all their assemblies ; and whilst in the company of the husbands he declaimed against the faults and mistakes of government, he joined their wives in railing against the profligacy of the Court ladies, and in inveighing against the King's mistresses : he agreed with them that the in-

dustrious poor were to pay for these cursed extravagances; that the city beauties were not inferior to those of the other end of the town, and yet a sober husband in this quarter of the town was satisfied with one wife; after which to out-do their murmurings he said that he wondered Whitehall was not yet consumed by fire from heaven, since such rakes as Rochester, Killigrew, and Sidney were suffered there, who had the impudence to assert that all the married men in the city were cuckolds and all their wives painted.* This conduct endeared him so much to the cits, and made him so welcome at their clubs, that at last he grew sick of their cramming and endless invitations."

But he had no mind as yet to return westward; probably it would not have been politic to do so; and his fertile brain evolved another form of amusement, of which a hint may have been given him by the Duke of Buckingham's famous escapades as a mountebank. He penetrated to the purlieus of the Tower, and having donned an appropriate dress and caused leaflets to be distributed announcing the arrival in London of a famous German doctor, learned in all the arts of healing, and bearing with him many infallible remedies, he caused a stage to be erected on Tower Hill opposite a goldsmith's shop and next door

* It was considered a sign of regular frailty to paint the face. See Evelyn's condemnation of the habit having gradually been acquired.

to the Black Swan. There this *rara avis*, indeed, was to be found under the name of Alexander Bendo, a name familiar to the students of his works, "from three of the clock in the afternoon till eight at night." His knowledge of his own drugs was only to be equalled by the intimacy he displayed with the more private side of Court life, and he astounded the simple citizens in both. It was almost as good fun as writing his *History of the Insipids*, for which satire on Charles he is supposed to have been forbidden the Court. He pretended to all sorts of knowledge, including those astrological experiments dear to the period, which consisted not only in an intimate acquaintance with the past but also in an uncanny intuition of the future. But what, perhaps, made him more popular than all else was that, as Grammont tells us, "his remedies principally consisted in giving present relief to unfortunate young women in all manner of diseases, and all kinds of accidents incident to the fair sex, either from too unbounded charity to their neighbours, or too great indulgence to themselves."

Rochester's frequent disgraces at Court did not always result in his merely passing from one part of the town to another, however. As we have seen he often withdrew to more rural solitudes, either to indite his satires and lampoons or for even less innocent forms of amusement. On one of these occasions he was accompanied

by Buckingham, and the pair in their quest of adventure disguised themselves and having discovered an inn which was to let on the Newmarket Road, promptly took it, each in turn acting the part of mine host. Having carefully observed the handsomest women in their vicinity, we are told, they invited those of the neighbouring farmers and others who were blessed with pretty wives or daughters to repasts at their inn, when the men were plied with liquor to good purpose, and the women "sufficiently warmed to make as little resistance as would be agreeable to their inclinations."

Realising after a while that this sort of thing would sooner or later create suspicion even in bucolic minds, they determined to bring it to a close about the time when Charles was due to go to Newmarket, when they knew that the amusement caused their royal master by a revelation of their escapades would restore them to favour and incidentally prove that they had not been indulging in any political intrigues inimical to the Government. Before closing the inn, however, there was one further adventure in which they had set their minds to indulge.

Close by resided an old miserly fellow blessed with a very pretty wife. The old man was exceedingly jealous of his charming spouse, and kept her carefully under the surveillance of himself or of an elderly maiden sister who lived with him. He was one of the few whom Rochester and

Buckingham never could prevail upon to accept of their hospitality—at least in company with his wife. As, however, he liked good cheer (when it cost him nothing) as well as most, it was arranged by the two reprobates that Buckingham should invite him to the inn what time Rochester, disguised as a woman, should go to his house and do his best to deceive the dragon (otherwise the maiden sister) who guarded it, and thus gain admittance to the young wife. Learning that the sister was not averse from good wine, Rochester went dressed as a young lady and carrying a bottle of the inn's best. Arrived at the house he began to parley, but to his disgust could not get beyond the front door. There was nothing for it but to feign illness, which he did by suddenly collapsing on the threshold. The noise brought the young wife on the scene, who ordered the poor fainting creature to be brought into the house. There, seated on a chair, Rochester was refreshed from his own bottle, which he offered in gratitude also to the duenna. But he had another bottle fortified with opium, and the first being finished he offered some of the contents of the latter to the old lady. She promptly accepted it, and as promptly fell fast asleep. No sooner was this first act accomplished, than Rochester begged the wife to allow of his lying down on a bed for a time. This was readily agreed to, when he began to talk to the young

lady about her husband, and she, thinking she was addressing one of her own sex, soon revealed the fact that she found him old, jealous, and altogether inadequate. Suffice it to say that matters came to such a pitch that Rochester felt no fear about revealing himself, and after some opposition all the girl's scruples were overcome. And not only this. Rochester was actually successful in persuading her to return to the inn with him, which she did after abstracting all her husband's money. The story is not a pleasant one in its earlier stages, in its later it is even less so. For Rochester, tiring after a time of his new mistress, handed her over to Buckingham, who in turn discarded her and advised her to go to London to follow the only trade for which she was now fitted. The old husband on his return to his inn, finding both wife and money gone, and his sister unconscious, hanged himself in a state of cerebral excitement.*

* There is a story extant of how Rochester, in conjunction with one of Charles's mistresses, cured that monarch of certain illicit pleasures unpleasing to the lady. For that purpose he accompanied the disguised king to a certain nocturnal rendezvous. There he arranged with one of the *habituées* to pick the royal pocket, what time he himself discreetly retired. When the time of departure arrived Charles found he had no money. He enquired for Lord Rochester, and was told he was gone. There was nothing for it but to ask the mistress of the house to allow him credit till the next day, but he was merely laughed at. At last, drawing off a rich ring, he asked that a jeweller should be sent for to advance money on it. After much difficulty this was done, but the jeweller on seeing the ring exclaimed: "There is only one man who can afford to wear it, and that is the King"; and when he entered the room where Charles was he recognised him and fell on his knees. Charles carried the matter off with his usual easy *bonhomie*, but he realised that it was dangerous for a monarch to indulge in such nocturnal exploits. Report does not tell what he had to say to My Lord Rochester on the matter!

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL OF ROCHESTER (*concluded*).

TO one of so mercurial a temperament as Rochester, this kind of life, amusing as a change and for the variety of human nature with which it brought him in touch, soon palled, and the Royal favour once again shining on him, he returned to more wonted haunts and pleasures.

In the year 1667 he had married Elizabeth, daughter of John Malet, or Mallet, Esq., of Enmere, in Somersetshire. Grammont calls her "une triste heritière," and she certainly was an heiress and was much sought after by some of the needy courtiers. Pepys records how Mrs. Ashburnham told him the way in which Miss Mallet was accustomed to describe her various lovers, and thus incidentally informs us whom they were. She said that Lord Herbert (son of the Earl of Pembroke) would have her; that Lord Hinchingbroke* was indifferent to have her; that Lord

* It is curious that Lord Hinchingbroke's son married Lady Rochester's daughter.

John Butler might not have her ; that Lord Rochester would have forced her ; and that Sir Francis Popham would do anything to have her. The last-named seems, indeed, to have been the favourite, in the sporting if not in the lady's sense. At this time the young lady was not yet twenty, and seems to have been anything but *triste*, and the portrait of her to be found among the " beauties " of the Court of Charles II is not of her at all, but was taken from a picture at Windsor representing a sad-faced lady supposed to be in keeping with Grammont's inappropriate epithet.*

With such a world of suitors to contend against, Lord Rochester seems to have thought that some drastic measures were necessary, and those he took to secure the young lady were highly characteristic. She had been supping at Whitehall with Miss Stewart, and was going home accompanied by her grandfather, Lord Hawley, in a coach to her lodgings, when, arrived at Charing Cross, her carriage was stopped by a number of men, mounted and on foot, and Miss Mallet was forcibly dragged out, placed in another coach provided with six horses, and carried off. Whether Rochester was in the coach is not clear, but two women were there to look after the lady.

Directly the affair was known pursuit was hot on the traces of Rochester and the abducted girl ; the former was taken at Uxbridge and promptly

* See Lord Braybrooke's note in Pepys's *Diary*.

sent to the Tower; of the latter no trace could be discovered. Lady Sandwich told so much to Pepys, and confessed that she was personally interested in the matter; as if the match should be broken off with Rochester, Lord Hinchingbroke, her son, bid fair to be the successful wooer of the lady and her £2,500 a year. A few days later Lady Sandwich tells Pepys that "my Lord Rochester is now declaredly out of hopes of Mrs. Mallet, and now she is to receive notice in a day or two how the King stands inclined to the giving leave for my Lord Hinchingbroke to look after her, and that being done to bring it to an end shortly." All this happened at the end of May, 1665. Nothing is heard of the matter again till the following February, when fresh efforts seem to have been made by the friends of Lord Hinchingbroke to revive the idea of a match, "and an overture hath been made to him by a servant of hers to compass the thing without consent of friends, she having a respect to my Lord's family; but my Lord will not listen to it but in the way of honour."* However, in the following August the diarist is able to write that "the business between my Lord Hinchingbroke and Mrs. Mallet is quite broke off; he attended her at Tunbridge and she declaring her affections to be settled; and he not being fully pleased with the vanity and liberty of her carriage."

* Pepys.

Indeed, Miss Mallet appears to have been a bit of a coquette, and her forcible abduction seems to have influenced her in favouring one who was so ready to make her his, and so resourceful in attempting it. We are rather in the dark as to subsequent events in this course of true love which certainly cannot be said to have run smooth. However, Pepys being at the Duke's playhouse on February 4th, 1667, to see *Heraclius*, "an excellent play," translated by Carbell from the French of Corneille, "saw my Lord Rochester and his lady, Mrs. Mallet, who hath after all this ado married him."*

The pair seem to have got on very well in their way—Rochester's way being a frequent absence from the domestic hearth; that of Lady Rochester a philosophical bearing united with a really tender regard. Rochester was, as we have seen in his relations with the King, a man who could do all sorts of daring things and get readily forgiven; if he was a libertine, he was certainly a chartered one; and it seems established that his bursts of affection for his wife made up in her eyes for his frequent and gross infidelities. Among the Harleian MSS. there is a collection of some forty letters written by Rochester to various people; and those to his wife may be compared with those

* In a contemporary news-letter it is stated, under date of January 29th, 1667, that "This morning the Earl of Rochester was married to Mrs. Mallet, Lord Hawley's grandchild, to whom Lord John Butler had for some time made his addresses."

written by Sir Richard Steele to his "dearest Prue," in that they exhibit signs of real affection not only for her but for his children, and they form the reverse of the medal on which Rochester has come down to posterity loaded with infamy and only relieved from perdition by a death-bed repentance. One does not think that Dr. Johnson (who was, by the way, always ready to defend Charles II) could have seen these missives when he wrote of Rochester that he passed his life "in a course of drunken gaiety, and gross sensuality, with intervals of study perhaps more criminal, with an avowed contempt of all decency and order; a total disregard of every moral and a resolute denial of every religious obligation."

Against this grave indictment let us place some proofs that the man, even before his last illness had made him a real penitent, was not all bad :—

"Dear wife,

I have no news for you, but that London grows very tiresome, and I long to see you; but things are now reduced to that extremity on all sides, that a man dares not turn his back for fear of being hang'd; an ill accident, to be avoided by all prudent persons, and therefore by

Your humble servant,

ROCHESTER."

Again, in another letter (they are all undated) he says :—

"It were very unreasonable should I not love you, whilst I believe you a deserving good creature. I am allready

soe weary of this place, that upon my word I could bee content to pass my winter at Cannington, though I apprehend the tediousness of it for you. Pray send me word what lyes in my power to doe for your service and ease, here or wherever else you can employ mee ; and assure yourselfe I will neglect your concern no more than forgett my owne. Twas very well for your son, as ill as you tooke it, that I sent him to Addesbury, for it proves at least to be the King's evill that troubles him, and he comes up to London this weeke to bee touch't. My humble service to my aunt Rogers, and Nan. I write in bed, and am afraid you can't read it."

Another letter written from Paris in April, but in which year is not stated, exhibits a solicitude for his wife's health which helps to throw a pleasanter light on Rochester's character than is usually shed upon it :—

" I should be infinitely pleased, madam, with the newes of your health. Hitherto I have not bin soe fortunate to heare any of you ; but assure yourselfe my wishes are of your side as much as possible. Pray only that they may be effectuall, and you will not want for happiness."

Many other letters exhibit the same solicitude for his wife's health ; the same affection for her. " I love you with all my heart " is an expression occurring or implied in most of these short missives. Rochester's amorous fancies may have wandered in devious and various ways, but there seems no reason to doubt that he really felt the respect and affection for his wife to which he so frequently gives expression in his letters. The lady on her part, judging from what epistolary communica-

tions to her husband exist, seems to have been a devoted wife, ready to make allowances for his shortcomings and to have pretty well gauged his character as that of a man who possessed many underlying good qualities, but who under the influence of a vicious environment had taken on the colour of his surroundings, and under the influence of strong waters allowed too often his better nature to be submerged.

There are among the letters two addressed by Rochester to his son, Lord Wilmot, the boy who only survived his father fifteen months,* and whose death put an end to the title of this creation :—

"I hope, Charles, when you receive this, and you know that I have sent this gentleman to bee your tutor, you will be very glad to see I take such care of you, and be very grateful, which is best shewn in being obedient and diligent. You are now grown big enough to be a man if you can be wise enough ; and the way to be truly wise is to serve God, learn your book, and observe the instructions of your parents first, and next your tutor, to whom I have entirely resigned you for this seven years ; and, according as you employ that time, you are to be happy or unhappy for ever. I have so good an opinion of you, that I am glad to think you will never deceive me. Deare childe, learn your booke, and be obedient, and you shall see what a father I will be to you. You shall want no pleasure whilst you are good ; and that you may be good are my constant prayers."

* Charles Bertie, writing to his sister, Lady Campden, on November 15th, 1681, says, "I am told the young Earl of Rochester is given over by the doctors."

The second short note runs thus :—

"Charles,

I take it very kindly that you write to me (though seldom), and wish heartily that you would behave yourself, so that I might shew how much I love you without being ashamed. Obedience to your grandmother, and those who instruct you in good things, is the way to make you happy here and for ever. Avoid idleness, scorn lying, and God will bless you, for which I pray.

ROCHESTER."

Those who have been accustomed to think of Rochester as the rake and inditer of much indecent verse will probably learn with surprise that he was an affectionate father who could give wise counsel to his son, even if he so seldom followed it himself.

Rochester, according to Aubrey, used to say that he did very well so long as he lived in the country, but that as soon as he got to Brentford he felt the devil enter into him ; and there is little doubt that with such a temperament as his it was rather by external influences that his mind was badly biassed than from inherent viciousness ; his character was of that weathercock kind with which all winds could play as they listed. Like many men endowed with such a nature he was adaptable to a degree, and just as amid sylvan surroundings he could be the tender husband and the careful father, so in the atmosphere of Whitehall and St. James's he was the reckless

libertine and the determined rake, eager to outdo in indecency and a sort of endued immorality those qualities in his companions.

Burnet has a passage severe enough but an essentially true picture of the man in this latter character: "He seems," writes the Bishop, "to have freed himself from all impressions of virtue or religion, of honour or good nature. He delivered himself without either restraint or decency to all the pleasures of wine and women. He had but one maxim, to which he adhered firmly, that he had to do everything and to deny himself in nothing that might maintain his greatness. He was unhappily made for drunkenness, for he had drunk all his friends dead and was able to subdue two or three sets of drunkards one after another: so it scarce ever appeared that he was disordered after the greatest drinking: an hour or two of sleep carried all off entirely, that no sign of them remained. He would go about business without any uneasiness or discovering heat either in body or mind. This had a terrible conclusion, for after he had killed all his friends he fell at last into such weakness of stomach that he had perpetual cholic, when he was not hot within and full of strong liquor, of which he was frequently seized, so that he was always either sick or drunk."

It would seem by a passage in the foregoing that although Rochester was at one time and for

many years full of drink, he could hardly be called drunk ; that is to say, his constant libations did not affect the saliency of his wit either spoken or written. His innumerable satires on both King and courtiers indicate that much excess only served to excite his brain to brilliancy, much as was the case with Sheridan ; and if many of his poems were written during stray intervals of sobriety in the country, at least many of his witty sayings were impromptus given forth at the Court itself. Of these the most famous are his lines on Charles II, which are said to have been fixed to the monarch's bedroom door :—

"Here lies our sovereign lord the King,
Whose word no man relies on ;
He never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one."

—a quatrain that more accurately sums up Charles's character than do pages of Clarendon's or Burnet's prose.

Apropos of Rochester's relations with Charles II there is a curious passage in one of Waller's letters to St. Evremond, which throws light on the subject in a dramatic form not dissimilar from that in Hervey's memoirs, where the supposed death of Hervey himself is told to Queen Caroline and her daughters. The passage was first published in Collet's *Relics of Literature*, and I give it with its introduction *in extenso*, as that book has become rather a scarce one :—

"Grammont once told Rochester," writes the poet, "that if he could by any means divest himself of one half of his wit, the other half would make him the most agreeable man in the world. This observation of the Count's did not strike me much when I heard it, but I have often marked the propriety of it since. Last night I supped at Lord Rochester's with a select party: on such occasions he is not ambitious of shining; he is rather pleasant than not; he is comparatively reserved; but you find something in that restraint, which is more agreeable than the utmost exertion of talent in others. The reserve of Rochester gives you the idea of a copious river that fills its channel and seems as if it would easily overflow its banks, but is unwilling to spoil the beauty and verdure of the plains. The most perfect good-humour was supported through the whole evening; nor was it in the least disturbed when unexpectedly towards the end of it the King came in" (no unusual thing with Charles II.). "Something has vexed him," said Rochester, "he never does me this honour but when he is in an ill humour." The following dialogue, or something very like it, then ensued:—

The King.—How the devil have I got here? The knaves have sold every cloak in the wardrobe.

Rochester.—Those knaves are fools. That is a part of dress which, for their own sakes, your Majesty ought never to be without.

The King.—Pshaw! I'm vexed!

Rochester.—I hate still life—I'm glad of it. Your Majesty is never so entertaining as when—

The King.—Ridiculous! I believe the English are the most intractable people upon earth.

Rochester.—I most humbly beg your Majesty's pardon, if I presume in that respect.

The King.—You would find them so were you in my place and obliged to govern.

Rochester.—Were I in your Majesty's place I would not govern at all.

The King.—How then?

Rochester.—I would send for my good Lord Rochester, and command him to govern.

The King.—But the singular modesty of that nobleman—

Rochester.—He would certainly conform himself to your Majesty's bright example. How gloriously would the two grand social virtues flourish under his auspices!

The King.—O, *prisca fides!* What can these be?

Rochester.—The love of wine and women.

The King.—God bless your majesty!

Rochester.—These attachments keep the world in good humour, and therefore I say they are social virtues. Let the Bishop of Salisbury deny it if he can.

The King.—He died last night; have you a mind to succeed him?

Rochester.—On condition that I shall neither be called upon to preach on the thirtieth of January, nor on the twenty-ninth of May.

The King.—Those conditions are curious. You object to the first, I suppose, because it would be a melancholy subject, but the other—

Rochester.—Would be a melancholy subject, too.

The King.—That is too much—

Rochester.—Nay, I only mean that the business would be a little too grave for the day. Nothing but the indulgence of the two grand social virtues could be a proper testimony of my joy upon that occasion.

The King.—Thou art the happiest fellow in my dominions. Let me perish if I do not envy thee thy impudence!

"It is," adds Waller, "in some such strain of conversation that this prince passes off his chagrin; and he never suffers his dignity to stand in the way of his humour. If happiness be the end of wisdom, I know not who has a right to censure his conduct."

The best talk is generally that which is most illusive when it is recorded, and nothing short of Boswell's photographic (phonographic would be a better word, perhaps) method suffices to hand down the sallies of wit, the allusive character, the fundamental knowledge of good conversation. Of a man's written words we have the printed

page, and can judge of it more accurately. It is a regrettable fact that Rochester's printed page cannot in these days be reproduced except in an expurgated way. The fact is that much of his wittiest output is the most objectionable. In his "works" the curious can read those satires and impromptus with which he was fond of castigating Lady Castlemaine and others, and from which sacred majesty did not screen the King himself. Dr. Johnson called the *Epistle to Lord Mulgrave*, the *Imitation of Horace*, and the poem *On Nothing*, a subject Flecknoe had previously treated and whose production may have given Rochester hints for *his*, among the best of his works. We know how Horace Walpole dismissed his Lordship's verses. But there is a certain lyrical sweetness about some of his poetry which raises it from the artificialities of that age into a higher plane—the plane on which Sedley wrote one or two imperishable things; the plane to which Suckling so often soared and where Lovelace dwelt.

If we compare him with contemporary poets, Rochester holds his own with such as Cotton and Roscommon, Sedley and Dorset. Unfortunately, however, his decent verse has not only become obscured by much *vers libre*, but also by many pieces of a like character which there is every reason to believe never emanated from his pen at all. Even in the first edition of his works

published in the year of his death, 1680, there are poems full of obscenity which are now generally supposed to be falsely attributed to him. But in this respect Rochester has become the victim of his own literary shortcomings. As he certainly did write much that was not fitted for the ears of youths and maidens, his works were pounced upon by that intolerable person Edmund Curll, who produced editions of the poems in which things with such suggestive titles as "The Delights of Venus," and the famous "Cabinet of Love," gave to the unlucky author a reputation even worse in this respect than he deserved. Frequently Rochester's poems are found published together with those of Roscommon and Dorset, with whose verses many of his more improper ones have an affinity. He was, however, apart from much indecency in verse, horribly scurrilous, and he found his facile muse an ever-ready ally in his attacks on those whom he disliked, and not infrequently on some who might have been supposed to rank among his friends. Like Rogers, the poet, who for the sake of saying a bitter thing would make onslaughts on all and sundry, so Rochester was content to forfeit friendship and create hate rather than suppress some sharp and abusive aggression. His power of invective was great, and he gave full play to it. This may be seen in certain of his satires which are included in the *State Poems*, a collection of abusive doggerel

which only the light it sheds on contemporary manners and customs can excuse.

It is not here the place to write a critical notice of Rochester's literary achievements, and therefore I refrain from quoting some of his verse which has the true poetic ring about it, and a certain Epicurean philosophy, which among the gay Whitehall throng was probably regarded as a substitute for deep thinking; but when he wrote such lines as—

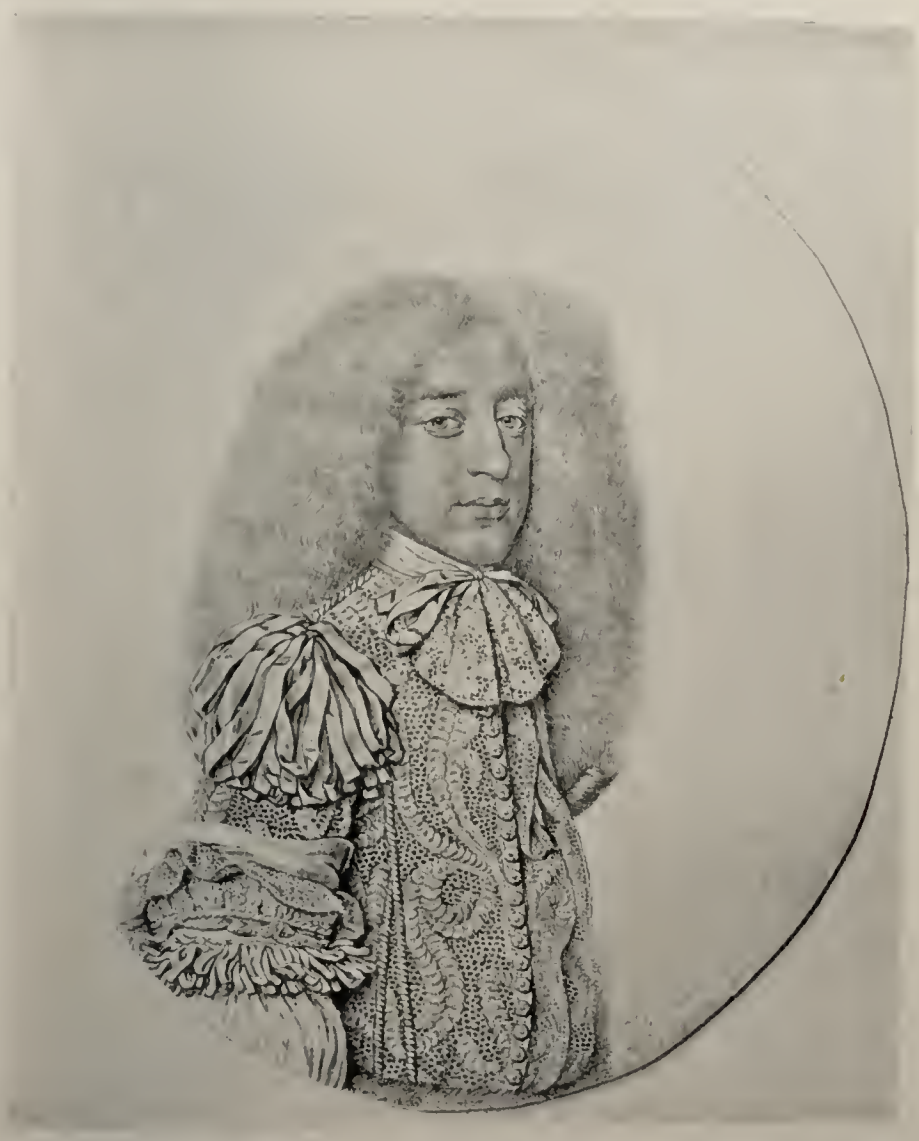
> "Love a woman! You're an ass,
> 'Tis a most insipid passion,
> To chuse out for your happiness,
> The silliest part of God's creation."

we may at once remark that nothing but the blackest ingratitude could have inspired such a verse; for, with the exception of wine, women at whom he rails had certainly afforded him the keenest gratification of his short life.

That life was drawing to a close. Rochester's dissolute habits, especially his inordinate power of drinking without apparently being greatly affected, had undermined a naturally vigorous constitution, and before he had reached the age of thirty he had become prematurely old. In 1679 he was attacked by a more than usually severe illness, and, as we have seen, for many years previously he had suffered greatly from the accumulated effects of his endless dissipations.

Women and wine were his twin divinities, and wine and women killed him. He was, however, destined to live a sufficient length of time in which to see the error of his ways, and to enter on that stage of repentance of which the details have been set down by Burnet in his famous book, *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester*. This work, the first edition of which appeared in the year of its subject's death, 1680, has been frequently reprinted, and has become something in the nature of a tract. Burnet had been introduced to Rochester under characteristic circumstances. He had, it appears, attended a mistress of that light-hearted peer, and had so satisfactorily administered consolation and hope to her in her last hours, that Rochester, hearing of his good offices, requested his attendance on himself. He was then in a state of convalescence, and the Bishop was wont to visit him once a week during one winter, with excellent effect. "They calmly discussed the merits of natural and revealed religion," we are told, while Burnet controverted the arguments of the sceptic and endeavoured to establish the faith of his friend. In the spring of 1680 Rochester quitted London for his residence at Woodstock, still, it seems, an unwilling disbeliever, but with his feelings softened, and many of his prejudices shaken.

As usual, the country air and life had a beneficial effect on him: his health began to mend;



THE EARL OF ROCHESTER.

(FROM A DRAWING BY LOGGAN.)

his spirits rose, and we may suppose that Burnet's ministrations were not for nothing in the general improvement. Unfortunately, however, Rochester had occasion to make a visit into Somersetshire, whither he travelled by horseback. The exertion, which would have been nothing to a man in robust health, was too much for his weakened constitution, and so disastrous was its effect that it was with difficulty he stood the strain of the return journey. He, indeed, came home to die. But he did not, in spite of all Burnet had tried to do, feel prepared, and he exhibited that terror and remorse which seem to assail the sceptic with the force of an accumulated load of retribution. The proximity of Oxford permitted of his receiving unstinted spiritual consolation ; and the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Marshal of Lincoln College, and Dr. Pierce of Magdalen are mentioned as among those who appeared at his bedside and sought to soothe his mental sufferings and alleviate his fears. It was due, however, as he told Burnet, to none of these, but to a certain Mr. Parsons that his conversion was completed. That gentleman was reading to the dying man the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, when " an inward light seemed to break upon his mind, so that "—I use his own words to Burnet—" he was not only convinced by the reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually restrain him, that he did ever after as

firmly believe in his Saviour as if he had seen Him in the clouds."

There is always a not unnatural scepticism as to the value of death-bed repentances, but, after all, they are better than no repentance at all; and if during a feverish life a man has not made the time to think of such things, it is satisfactory to find that when illness forces him to do so at least his thoughts are turned from the mundane things which have hitherto occupied his mind. One of Rochester's last letters was addressed to the Dr. Pierce mentioned above, whom he asks continually to pray for him and to whom he made known his resolve, should he recover, " to become a new man."

But recovery was out of the question, and he seems to have passed many of his declining days in religious exercises and in receiving visits from various friends. One of these was a certain Mr. Fanshaw, one of his old companions, who could not believe in the change which had come over the once gay and dissolute Rochester of Whitehall. A manuscript account of this visit has been preserved, and from it one learns that " Mr. Fanshaw, sitting by the bedside, perceived his lordship praying, and acquainted Dr. Radcliffe who attended my Lord Rochester in this illness, and was then in the house, with what he had heard; and told him that my Lord was certainly delirious, for to his knowledge, he said, he believed neither

in God nor in Jesus Christ. The doctor, who had often heard him pray in the same manner, proposed to Mr. Fanshaw to go up to his Lordship to be further satisfied touching this affair. When they came to his room the Doctor told my Lord what Mr. Fanshaw said, upon which his Lordship addressed himself to Mr. Fanshaw to this effect : 'Sir, it is true, you and I have been very bad and profane together, and then I was of the opinion you mention. But now I am quite of another mind, and happy I am that I am so. I am very sensible how miserable I was whilst of another opinion. Sir, you may assure yourself that there is a Judge and a future state.' "

What Rochester said during his last days to Burnet confirms the impression that he repented his past, and so if his life was not edifying his end certainly was. He desired, among other signs of grace, that such poems of his as were indecent or immoral should be destroyed. If his wishes were carried out, then it is certain, as has been surmised, that such of this character as appeared in print could not have been his.

It has frequently happened that when a man has produced anything of this sort he has been marked down to bear the burdens of others, and all sorts of profane effusions have been credited to him without any real justification. The case of the notorious Marquis de Sade is one in point. He wrote *Justine*, and therefore the *Philosophie*

dans le Boudoir has been erroneously attributed to him. Neither his life nor that of Rochester can be regarded as a pattern in any way one looks at it, but that is no reason why a censorious posterity should judge these men as worse than they really were.

Rochester's life and death have their moral, and Burnet, who realised this, has left one of the best "tracts" in existence on the subject. That life, so early begun amid the heated and factitious chambers of Whitehall, closed among the sylvan glades of Woodstock, on July 26th, 1680. No better allegory of Rochester's career could be found than this transition from the storms of passion to the safe calm waters of ultimate peace.

Mrs. Wharton wrote an elegy on Rochester which forms the subject of some lines by Waller, who regards the lady's effusion as—

> ". . . . . lasting verse,
> Which so preserves the hero's name,
> They make him live again in fame."

But it was Rochester himself who once wrote four lines worth the whole of his other poetical achievements put together, and which form his truest elegy :—

> "Then Old Age and Experience, hand in hand,
> Lead him to Death, and make him understand,
> After a search so painful and so long,
> That all his life he has been in the wrong."

The great Master of Balliol was fond of repeating these lines, and on one occasion Tennyson declaimed them with "almost terrific force" to Lecky. To leave Rochester in the company of three such men as these seems almost a rehabilitation in itself.

SIR GEORGE ETHEREDGE.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR GEORGE ETHEREDGE.

AT one time Etheredge was perhaps the least known, as a man, of any of the wits and rakes who helped to give to the Restoration its distinctive character. I say as a man, because as a dramatist his claim to hold a high, and for certain reasons a unique, rank among the writers of that period has been unchallenged; and the author of *The Comical Revenge*, *She Would if She Could*, and, above all, *The Man of Mode*, has long since occupied an unassailable position as not only a pre-eminent writer of the comedy of manners, but as a precursor in a certain form of dramatic construction which for many years influenced the methods of men even greater than himself. Of his private life, however, little was really known, with the exception of one incident which made so much noise at the time that in the absence of other recorded

events it has occupied a more prominent place in his career than otherwise it would probably have done. The very mode of his death was for long erroneously given; the date of that event was incorrect; and, indeed, Etheredge might well have gone down to remotest posterity a vague and somewhat shadowy figure hanging on perilously to his three dramatic efforts, had not his own famous Letter-Book been discovered and described by Mr. Edmund Gosse, who by its means was enabled, many years ago now, to create something like a living entity from what had hitherto been a nebulous personality.

But even this source of information leaves many *lacunae* in the life of Etheredge: it throws light on a portion of his career—that portion which was passed abroad; but there is still much in which the "it is said that" painfully obscures the "it was." By the means of the Letter-Book the exact date of Dryden's letter in verse to Etheredge, in which he apostrophises him thus:—

> "To you who live in chill degree,
> As map informs, of fifty-three,
> And do not much for cold atone
> By bringing thither fifty-one."

is settled as being 1686; so that if Etheredge was fifty-one in that year he must, as Mr. Gosse remarks, have been born in 1634, or early in 1635; or a year or two before the hitherto accepted date of that event.

The Etheredges were an Oxfordshire family, one branch of which was settled at Buntingford in Hertfordshire, and George is said by Gildon, who knew him, to have been one of the original stock. Of his early life little is known, but we find that he went to school at Thame and was for a time at Cambridge (at least Oldys surmised that he was), which he seems to have left without taking a degree. Having private means he was enabled after his university career to travel abroad, and it was then probably that he made himself acquainted with French literature, of which the excellent effects were so obvious when he began to write plays. He is said to have entered one of the Inns of Court. Like many young men of fortune he may have read for the Bar and even been called; but that appears to have been the sum of his connection with the Law, which was hardly a career likely to suit such a temperament as his.

It is generally supposed that he spent at least five years in France—Mr. Gosse conjectures from 1658 to 1663—and his fluency in the French language, and a Gallic turn of thought which characterises his plays, make this assumption probable. His name became noised about when his first play, *The Comical Revenge*, was produced. This occurred in 1664, and until then he must have lived the life of a well-to-do young man, amusing himself in a foreign land, and only returning

to his own country after the Restoration had brought with it something of the gaiety and frivolity previously almost wholly confined to the French capital.

Whether or no he made any figure at the French Court is a question. I am inclined to think not, because had he done so it is probable that Grammont, when he came to record through Anthony Hamilton his experiences, would have had something more to say about him than the bare allusion which he makes to him in his Memoirs, where he simply mentions the name of Etheredge with those of Rochester, Sedley and Dorset as among the band of wits who exposed the jealous Lord Chesterfield in numberless ballads and lampoons.

When Etheredge did become known to the wits and rakes of the Restoration he at once became a popular figure; and Gentle George, as he was termed, was noted not only for his easy manners and his readiness to take part in the recognised profligacy of the time, but also for his dramatic ability and his air of consummate dandyism, which caused him to be regarded as one of the finest gentlemen of the Court. Lockier, who knew him but apparently did not love him, told Spence that Sir George Etheredge was as thorough a fop as ever he saw; he was, added Lockier, "exactly his own Sir Fopling Flutter—and yet he designed Dorimont, the genteel rake

of wit, for his own picture." The Dean may have been correct according to his lights in his estimation of Etheredge's character, but when he says that the playwright indicated his own person in the Dorimont of the play he goes against the general opinion, which has it that it was Rochester who figured under this disguise.

It was with the appearance of *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub,* that Etheredge first came into general notice, and indeed first became known to the wits of Whitehall. He had wisely dedicated the play to Charles, Lord Buckhurst, later the Earl of Dorset, and this charming patron must have been for much in the newcomer's success. In the dedication Etheredge writes: "I could not have wished myself more fortunate than I have been in the success of this poem" (so he calls the play); "the writing of it was a means to make me known to your lordship; the acting of it has lost me no reputation, and the printing of it has now given me an opportunity to show how much I honour you." Pepys saw the play on January 4th, 1665, and he found it "very merry, but only so by gesture, not wit at all." Later, he goes to see it again, when he calls it "a silly play," and seems only to have been reconciled by the sight in the playhouse of many beautiful women—especially Lady Castlemaine, who appeared "exceeding noble," as she always did to Pepys.

The Diarist is not, however, altogether a safe guide either in matters theatrical or literary, and *The Comical Revenge* stands out from the dramatic productions of the period in that it inaugurated a new method: the serious scenes being in the rhymed heroic metre, the comic ones being in verse. Dryden seems first to have suggested the new departure, and in *The Rival Ladies* of 1663 to have in a slight degree adumbrated its use; but it was Etheredge who first, in 1664 when *The Comical Revenge* was produced, carried it out; and although the feature was not destined to survive later than Sedley's *Beauty the Conqueror*, first acted in 1702, it did for a certain length of time hold the stage, and Etheredge has the credit of the innovation.*

Etheredge had another advantage over the majority of contemporary dramatists. His lengthy sojourn in France and his intimate acquaintance with the language and literature of that country had made him familiar with the earlier work of the incomparable Molière. An entirely fresh conception of what comedy should be was revealed to him, and he returned to his own country imbued with such ideas. Little as he wrote, he thus takes an important place among English dramatists, who have owed to him more than is generally supposed.

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* See Mr. Gosse's *Sixteenth Century Studies*, where the whole matter is carefully examined.

Although Pepys did not think much of *The Comical Revenge*, others were not of his opinion, and on its appearance it met with an extraordinary reception. Lord Buckhurst, to whom, as we have seen, it was dedicated, was especially struck by it even in its inchoate form of rehearsal, and it was by him that Etheredge was first introduced to the gay band of wits, Buckingham, Rochester, Sedley and the rest, with whom he was for a time to pass much of his ample leisure, and in whose pranks and unbounded licence he was destined to become an outstanding partner. Horace Walpole in one of his letters says that Etheredge wrote genteel comedy because he lived in the best company; but he indicates what effect the best company had on the dramatist's work by elsewhere acknowledging that his plays were too indelicate. The fact is that Etheredge wrote genteel comedy not because of his fine friends, but because he had studied the work of a master; the indelicacy was introduced because it was as much part and parcel of Court life as were the wits with whom the writer consorted.

Four years after the appearance of *The Comical Revenge* Etheredge produced another play, *She Would if She Could*. It was first performed at the Duke's Theatre, and Pepys tells how a thousand people were turned away from the pit door, so great was the rush of those anxious to see the piece. The diarist himself, after much trouble,

succeeded in getting an eighteen-penny box, which apparently only the fact that Mrs. Pepys was with him made him attempt. His criticism was again adverse. "Lord!" he exclaims, "how full was the house, and how silly the play, there being nothing in the world good in it, and few people pleased in it."

That *She Would if She Could* is influenced by Molière is obvious, and its similarity in parts to *Le Tartufe* has caused the assumption that Etheredge may have seen the original performance of that masterpiece at Versailles in 1664, as the play was not actually printed till five years later. In his new work Etheredge gives us as the *décor* the west end of London, and St. James's Street and the Park are among the *mises-en-scène*. "The play," says Mr. Gosse, "distinguishes itself from the comic work of Dryden or Wycherley or Shadwell, even from that of Congreve, by the little graphic touches, the intimate impression, the clear, bright colour of the scenes." *Pace* Pepys the town was enthusiastic about it, and from the King (who was present at the first performance) downwards all, or nearly all, combined in praising it and in hailing the playwright as a sort of popular hero.

Had Etheredge's powers of concentration and application equalled his gifts as a dramatic writer, we should not have had to confine ourselves to the notice of only three plays from his pen.

But as Macaulay says, he was dissolute; one success had introduced him to high life, another confirmed him in the position of a brilliant wit. Four years divided the writing of the first two plays; eight years were to elapse before the third and last of his dramatic compositions was to be given to the world. This last effort was his best-known piece, perhaps his most brilliant and finished production, *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter*, which was brought out at the Duke's Theatre in 1676. To give additional strength to the new work Etheredge dedicated it to Mary of Modena, who had but three years before, at the age of fifteen, become the second wife of James, Duke of York. The play depends for its success on sparkling dialogue and vivid characterisation; and although those who required a plot found practically none, the general public greeted such a character as Sir Fopling with delight. Some of the characters were frankly portraits, although there seems some difference of opinion as to whether Etheredge drew himself as Young Bellair, or Dorimont as Dean Lockier asserted, or as Sir Fopling, which character Lockier said exactly resembled him. As a matter of fact Dorimont is said to have been dressed so to resemble Rochester that it was impossible to mistake him, and in Medley the public recognised Sir Charles Sedley. Pepys may have seen the play, but his record had long closed

before its appearance,* and so we are probably saved another difference of opinion from that held by the town at large. The play had a great and deserved success when it was first performed at the beginning of June, 1676.

Unfortunately for Etheredge his glory was within a few weeks of this to be dimmed by an adventure with which his name is as much connected as it is with his dramatic efforts and his general character of gay man about town. This adventure may be termed the Epsom incident of his career. In those days Epsom was a very fashionable resort. In Leigh Hunt's novel entitled *Memoirs of Sir Ralph Esher* will be found an excellent picture of the place during the reign of Charles II. Shadwell, too, in his play, *Epsom Wells* (to which, by the way, Sedley wrote the prologue) gives us vignettes of the town where Lord Buckhurst lived for a time with Nell Gwynn and where racing had taken place so early as the days of James I, and was to have a recrudescence under Charles II, who often found his favourite Newmarket too far away to be convenient. Pepys was an occasional visitor to Epsom, which seems to have been an earlier equivalent of what Bath was to become later, and Tunbridge Wells later still. Once the diarist found the place so full that he could not get a lodging, and had to

* The Diarist in 1668 encountered Etheredge, with Buckhurst Buckingham and Sedley, at the play, and heard the former "mightily find fault with the actors."

go towards Ashstead before he was able to secure a room at a wayside inn. Thus Epsom, unlike to-day when the one great yearly event is alone capable of crowding it, was in those times a popular and fashionable resort.

Here, then, during the middle of June, Etheredge and Rochester, accompanied by two friends, Captain Bridges and Mr. Downes, betook themselves on a certain Sunday night. What happened at first is a little obscure. No doubt they dined; no doubt some itinerant musicians were hired to play during the repast; no doubt the bottle passed freely enough, and the quartette got drunk. The sequel we learn from a passage in the Hatton Correspondence, that mine of information about all sorts of men and things during the reign of the Merry Monarch :—

"Mr. Downs is dead. Ye Lord Rochester doth abscond, and soe doth Etheredge and Captain Bridges who ocasioned ye riot Sunday sennight. They were tossing some fiddlers in a blanket for refusing to play, and a barber, upon ye noise, going to see what ye matter was, they seized upon him, and to free himself from them he offered to carry them to ye handsomest woman in Epsom, and directed them to the constable's house, who demanding what they came for, they told him a wench, and, he refusing to let them in, they broke open his doores and broke his head, and beat him very severely. At last he made his escape,

called his watch, and Etheredge made a submissive oration to them, and soe far appeased them that ye constable dismissed his watch. But presently after, ye Lord Rochester drew upon ye constable. Mr. Downs, to prevent his pass, seized on him, ye constable cryed out murther, and, the watch returning, one came behind Mr. Downs and with a sprittle staff cleft his scull. Ye Lord Rochester and ye rest run away, and Downs having noe sword snatched up a sticke, and striking at them they run him into ye side with a halfe pike, and so bruised his arme that he was never able to stirr it after." *

As in the case of similar escapades there is nosequel to this one. Rochester and Etheredge lay low for a time, and when the affair had blown over recommenced their daily life of men of pleasure whose only thought was how many bottles they could consume, how many women betray, how much money lose. One of Etheredge's favourite haunts was Locket's Ordinary, a tavern that in those days stood near Buckingham Court, Spring Gardens, on the site now occupied by Drummonds' well-known Bank. Locket's was a great resort of the wits, and specially catered for the officers of the Horse Guards. Its name occurs frequently in the plays of Cibber and Vanbrugh, and in Etheredge's own *Man of Mode* it is mentioned :—

* Hatton Correspondence, vol. i, p. 133.

Bellair.—"Where do you dine?"

Dorimont.—"At Long's or Locket's."

Medley.—"At Long's let it be."

Etheredge was a regular *habitué* of the place, but at last he ran up such a large score that, being at the time in one of his chronic states of impecuniosity, he began to absent himself and to patronise other establishments. Abraham Locket seems to have been an easy-going man; Mrs. Locket was, however, made of sterner stuff; and one day she sent a messenger to Etheredge's lodging to dun him for the money. His reply was characteristic. "If," he said, "she took any further steps in the matter he would come and kiss her." At this the indignant lady bridled up, and calling for her hood and scarf told her husband that "she would soon see if there was an impertinent fellow living who would have the impudence to do it." "Prythee," my dear," answered her patient spouse, not, one may imagine, without a spice of ironical implication in the rejoinder, "don't be so rash; there is no telling to what lengths a man will go when blinded by anger." Report, as is so often the case, stops short at the really interesting part of the story, and we shall never know whether Mrs. Locket visited the poet, whether the poet kept his word, and if so what Mr. Locket had to say about the matter on his wife's return to the tavern at Charing Cross. One rather suspects from another anecdote

that Etheredge was a privileged person, and probably Mrs. Locket would not have minded submitting to his "impudence" in the way he suggested exhibiting it. Once he and a friend were dining at the Ordinary, and in consequence of some neglect on the part of one of the "drawers," as they were called, trounced the man so severely that the uproar reached the ever-vigilant ears of the lady. Out came Mrs. Locket in what was probably but assumed anger to know what the trouble was about. It was explained to her, and Etheredge wound up his complaint by remarking, with mock severity, "We are so provoked that even I could find it in my heart to pull the nosegay out of your bosom and fling it in your face!" Who could be angry with so gentle and provocative a threat, and the incident is said to have closed in a general laugh.

Etheredge seems to have been one of those men who pass from one scrape to another; who are continually in trouble; and who rise cork-like from the waters of embarrassment. On January 4th 1680 the roof of the tennis court in the Haymarket collapsed. This tennis-court, a fashionable resort at this period, was situated on the south side of James Street, at the back of the east side of the main thoroughfare, and was originally a part of Shaver's Hall, a noted gaming-house during the seventeenth century. It is from the Hatton Correspondence again that we learn of this catas-

trophe, together with the further facts that "Sir George Etheredge and several others were very dangerously hurt. Sir Charles Sedley had his skull broke, and it is thought it will be mortal." However, as we know, Sedley did not succumb to his injuries; indeed, he lived for nearly twenty-two years longer; while Etheredge, although seriously hurt, recovered.

It was in the same year that he lost one of his boon companions, Lord Rochester, who died at Woodstock on the following July 26th. There is a special link between Rochester and Etheredge in the fact that the famous Mrs. Barry, whom the former "protected" and introduced to the stage, became on his death the mistress of the latter, by whom she had a daughter who died in childhood, but on whom Etheredge is said to have settled no less than six thousand pounds.

Five years before this, Rochester, in the *Session of the Poets*, refers to his friend as being incorrigibly lazy, but as possessing "fancy, sense, judgment and wit." In another contemporary poem, *The Present State of Matrimony*, he is accused of a less forgivable offence. We have seen how in the notice of his tennis-court accident he is described as "Sir" George. This appears to be the earliest instance of his title being recorded, and the assumption is that it was not long before this incident that he had obtained the knighthood. In *The Present State of Matrimony* he is roundly

accused of marrying a rich widow in order to enable him to buy the title, and there seems no reason to doubt, in any case, that he contracted this *mariage de convenance* for purely financial reasons. On the other hand, it has been said that the lady would only consent to become his wife on his having previously obtained the title. She was anxious to be "My Lady," and no doubt was willing to advance the necessary funds to compass that ambition.

Notwithstanding the success of his plays and the accession to his original fortune by that brought him by his wife, Etheredge, through whose hands money would appear to have run like water, soon found himself faced by necessity. He was not of that class of men who can, or are willing to, set to work to retrieve their broken fortunes, and like many another he sought in a foreign appointment an easy means of genteel subsistence. Through the good offices of Mary of Modena, who had always shewn a friendly interest in his affairs, he obtained the post of ambassador to Ratisbon, or as the wits of the day humorously put it, Rot-his-bones. It was not his first experience of diplomatic work, for when Sir Daniel Harvey was sent in 1668 as Ambassador Extraordinary from Charles II to the Sultan of Turkey, he "took with him for his secretary, Mr. George Etheridg." * This explains the sati-

* Rugge's *Diurnal.*

rical lines which appeared at the time and which have been preserved by that snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, the antiquary Oldys :—

> "Ovid to Pontus sent for too much wit,
> Etheredge to Turkey for the want of it."

He had, too, on one occasion been sent by Charles II on a quasi-diplomatic mission to The Hague, so that he may be said to have had at least a slight apprenticeship in such matters. It was in the year of his master's death, 1685, that he was entrusted by his successor James with the ambassadorial duties at Ratisbon, and he set out for his new post with the light-hearted irresponsibility that characterised all his actions. Much of the life of Etheredge at Ratisbon is revealed in the "Letter Book" to which reference has already been made and which not only sheds a light on the man's character as exemplified in his own epistles, but also on certain aspects of his career abroad, which his secretary, a treacherous underhanded creature, makes no bones about recording and sending home. There is no doubt, as Mr. Gosse pointed out, that from this source one gets an extraordinarily vivid picture of Etheredge who had, hitherto, been a very shadowy personage, flitting through the Restoration period with three plays, an unpleasant incident, and a not very creditable marriage, attached to his name, and with little else.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR GEORGE ETHEREDGE (*concluded*).

IN the March of 1685, Etheredge started for Ratisbon but sojourns at The Hague (where, we have seen, he had been before) and Amsterdam, and no doubt elsewhere, resulted in his not reaching his destination till the end of August. Incidentally we learn that he got so drunk at The Hague that he passed the whole of one night in an unconscious state in one of the streets—the only occasion, I suppose, on which an ambassador was ever publicly in such a scandalous condition.

Ratisbon was blissfully ignorant of the kind of gentleman who was coming to represent His Britannic Majesty in its midst, and when he arrived he was received by the French and Spanish Ambassadors with *empressement*. He took a house whose garden ran down to the river, and was not long before he had his carriage and horses, and a fairly considerable staff of servants. The fever which he speaks of having during the early days

of his residence may have been due to change of living or the air or what not, but is probably more attributable to his passion for the bottle. Apparently he at first found the place dull, and he surmised that the authorities had taken pains to banish all pastimes from the city. He regrets the removal of a certain Countess of Nostitz, as he learnt that "good company met at her house, and she had a little hombre to entertain them." He remarks significantly that "a more *commode* lady, by what I hear, never kept a basset table in London." However, "malice would not let her live in quiet," and so she had gone to Prague.

Etheredge was not long in finding that the life of a German provincial town was very different from that to which he had been long used in London. In the capital he had become a personage through his dramatic work, his successful gallantry, and his open-handed manner of living. Charles and his Court had looked indulgently on one who seemed born and bred to add lustre to Whitehall. Among the band of wits he held a conspicuous place, among the well-dressed and well-mannered men of pleasure he was equally noticeable, and those who could claim to be his competitors in such things were men of the calibre of Buckingham and Rochester and Sedley.

In place of such a gay butterfly existence he now found himself in a society which was heavy

and, above all, alien. As an ambassador he had some claims to distinction, but the title when associated with a lesser town like Ratisbon was the most decorative part of the office, and connoted more than it really was. The result was inevitable: Etheredge spent much of his time in gambling and drinking, in getting into all sorts of scrapes through his habit of flouting public opinion and disregarding Teutonic prejudices by extending what is euphemistically called his "protection" to actresses and ladies of easy ethics. Indeed, he in time thoroughly disgusted the good people of Ratisbon by his debauched habits and his perpetual breaches of the social etiquette which they held so dear. He laboured too under another grievous disadvantage—he was ignorant of the language, nor does he appear to have troubled himself about acquiring it. The consequence was that all his affairs, political and social, had to be transacted through the medium of subordinates, and his secretary, who plainly reveals himself as a time-serving ruffian, not only betrayed him over and over again but forwarded reports to headquarters detrimental to his master's character and interests.

From the aforesaid "Letter Book" can be gained a good idea of Etheredge's habits of life and of the various scrapes into which he not so much fell as flung himself. At first, in the blush of his new appointment, he had comported

himself with a certain restraint and dignity; but familiarity with his surroundings soon wore off this veneer and he began to be lax and unconventional. His early experience of French manners and customs—so opposite to those that obtained in Ratisbon—threw him, not unnaturally, by choice into the society of such Frenchmen as were living in the town, and he appears to have made the French Embassy almost a second home; not in itself reprehensible, but a somewhat injudicious proceeding on the part of an ambassador. Then, too, anybody of that country who might happen to be passing through Ratisbon found in him a boon companion, and again and again he appears to have taken up with disreputable *chevaliers d'industrie*, so long as they hailed from France and spoke its language. One instance of the kind occurred in 1686 when a swindler named Purpurat arrived, and by a number of artifices having wormed his way into Etheredge's good graces, proceeded to ease him of no less a sum than ten thousand crowns, at cards. However, some suspicion in this case appears to have been aroused in the mind of the easy-going Ambassador, and he did not let the fellow go until he had won the best part of the money back.

But a more serious incident was to interrupt the tenor of Etheredge's indolent epicurean existence. It is recorded by Etheredge himself, and his secretary also forwarded home his com-

mentary on it. Among a theatrical troupe which came to Ratisbon during the same year as that in which the Purpurat episode took place was an actress whose surname has not survived but whose christian name was Julia. She was apparently not only a good actress, but also sound on the moral side, and Etheredge, it is said, was never anything more than a platonic friend—even the censorious people of Ratisbon never pretended he was anything else, and had they done so the unsullied character of the lady would have been sufficient to give them the lie. But the trouble was that not moral so much as social prejudices were excited by the friendship of an ambassador with a "gipsy." In England, actors, even in those days, were regarded as fit companions for the most exalted, but in Germany they were looked upon in a very different light—useful as ministers of pleasure, but by no means to be associated with on terms of equality. Imagine then the excitement of the strait-laced inhabitants of Ratisbon on learning that the English Ambassador had not only paid Julia a visit of ceremony but had invited her to the Embassy itself. Amazement and indignation! Etheredge was insulted, cut by the great ones of the place, and left in no doubt as to the heinousness of his offence. It all sounds comic enough in our more enlightened and tolerant days, but at the time it was serious and was productive of something still more serious.

On November 25th, 1686, Etheredge, nothing daunted, had invited the lady to dine at the Embassy, where she was to meet the French Ambassador and some others who were less narrow in their ideas than the majority of the Bavarians. The dinner took place, but in the midst of it a great uproar was heard outside the house, which was found to be surrounded by a mob of students and other youthful *censores morum* (it is remarkable how moral young people can be when there is a chance of making a riot out of it), who hurled stones at the windows and shouted all sorts of insults against both host and guests. Etheredge, who possessed plenty of courage, suddenly opened the door, to be greeted by a shouted request that the play actress should be delivered over to the tender mercies of the crowd. But they reckoned without their host, for arming all his servants with whatever came to hand as suitable means of attack and defence, Etheredge rushed out against the mob at the head of his household, and so successfully that he drove it back and kept it at bay until he was able to put Julia into a carriage and convey her safely to her lodgings. The next day, however, she was carried off to prison, and Etheredge thereupon sent a written protest to the ringleader. He received no satisfaction, however, and for some time so acute was public feeling that he thought it wiser when adventuring abroad to go armed. Eventually Julia was released on

condition that she and her company should depart forthwith from Ratisbon.

If Julia was a rose Etheredge seems to have experienced nothing but the thorns, and although at least one of his lyrics in French can be traced to her influence, at the same time Ratisbon ever after regarded him with suspicion, and he was not free from complaints which his wife sent him on the subject. It is a little uncertain as to what had happened to Lady Etheredge during this time, nor is it clear whether she accompanied her husband in the first instance to Ratisbon. That she was in any case in Germany during the Julia episode is proved by the fact that a letter from her, in which she calls her husband a rogue, was addressed from Nuremburg. But she probably returned to England shortly after, as we find Etheredge writing to Lord Mulgrave asking him to try to compose the quarrel, while he also addressed a very submissive and tactful letter to the lady herself, who was at the time (March, 1687) presumably in her native land.

As may well be supposed Etheredge's sojourn at Ratisbon would have been well-nigh intolerable had it not been for the links he still preserved with his old boon companions of Whitehall, to whom he imparted all his experiences and by whose replies he was kept in touch with the life of which he always regretted the loss. For instance, we find him writing to the Duke of

Buckingham and expressing amazement at the news he had received of his friend's retirement from Court, a report which he says he hears "with no less astonishment than I should hear of his Christian Majesty turning Benedictine monk, or the Pope's wearing a long periwigg and setting up for a flaming beau in the seventy-fourth year of his age." "Who could have prophesy'd," he adds, "that the Duke of Buckingham, who never vouchsafed his embraces to any ordinary beauty, would ever condescend to sigh and languish for the heiress-apparent of a thatched cottage in a straw hat, flannen petticoat, stockings of as gross a thrum as the Blew Coat boy's Caps at the Hospital, and a smock (the Lord defend me from the wicked idea of it) of as coarse a canvas as ever served an apprenticeship to a mackerel boat? Who would have believed that Your Grace, the most polished, refined epicure of his age, that had regaled himself with the most exquisite wines of Italy, Greece and Spain, would in the last scene of Life debauch his constitution in execrable Yorkshire ale? and that he who all his lifetime had either seen princes his playfellows or companions would submit to the nonsensical chat and barbarous language of farmers and higglers."

Among the letters given in the *Works* of Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, is one of inordinate length, from Etheredge, in which old times are recalled,

gay suppers with the Duke and Dorset and Sedley and the rest are remembered, and the favours and smiles of the too complacent fair . . . . The opening passages throw some light on the very different existence carried on by the once gay Lothario of Whitehall, now the rather saddened exile of Ratisbon :—

" I have been long enough in this town (one would think)," he writes, " to have made acquaintance enough with persons of both sexes so as never to be at a loss how to pass the few vacant hours I can allow myself ; but the terrible drinking that accompanies all our visits, hinders me from conversing with the men so often as I would otherwise do, and the German ladies are so intolerably reserved and virtuous (with tears in my eyes I speak it to Your Grace), that it is next to an impossibility to carry on an intrigue with them. A man has so many scruples to conquer, and so many difficulties to surmount before he can promise himself the least success, that for my part I have given over all pursuits of this nature : besides there is so universal a spirit of censoriousness reigns in this town that a man and a woman cannot be seen at ombre or piquet together but it is immediately concluded some other game has been played between them ; and as this renders all manner of access to ladies almost impracticable for fear of exposing their reputation to the mercy of their ill-natured

neighbours, so it makes an innocent piece of gallantry often pass for a criminal correspondence."

Etheredge proceeds to tell Buckingham that in consequence of these disabilities there is only one family in Ratisbon with whom he can be really said to have an intimate acquaintance, viz., that of a certain Monsieur Hoffman, "a frank, hearty, jolly companion," whose lady, he says, is "a most accomplished ingenious person, and notwithstanding she is come into a place where so much formality and stiffness are practised, keeps up all the vivacity and air and good humour of France." Unfortunately, we learn that after having only known this delightful *ménage* a few months Etheredge had to mourn the loss of its head, Monsieur Hoffman with some twenty other people being drowned in the Danube owing to the sinking of the ferry-boat in which they were crossing the river. The widow was disconsolate, all the house was hung with black; she would receive none, even of her nearest relations. Etheredge determined, however, to try his power of persuasion in order to turn her from this inordinate grief. He went to the house, was admitted, and after all sorts of arguments succeeded so well in his purpose of bringing the widow to reason that she consented at last to eat some supper, a course recommended by her visitor. "Upon condition you will sup with me," replies our afflicted lady, "I will submit to your

prescription." "In short," concluded Etheredge, "we had a noble regale that evening in her bedchamber, and our good widow pushed the glass so strenuously about that her comforter (meaning myself) could hardly find the way to his coach. To conclude this farce, this Phœnix of her sex, this pattern of conjugal fidelity, two mornings ago was married to a smooth-chinned ensign of Count Trantmandorf's regiment that had not a farthing in the world but his pay to depend on. I assisted at the ceremony, though I little imagined the lady would take the matrimonial receipt so soon."

Sometimes Etheredge conveys his impressions of the life of Ratisbon in rhymes, of which we have these verses, sent to Lord Middleton, as a specimen :—

> "Where, minding nothing all the day,
> And all the night too, you will say;
> To make grave legs in formal fetters,
> Converse with fops, and write dull letters;
> To go to bed 'twixt eight and nine,
> And sleep away my precious time;
> In such an idle sneaking place,
> Where vice and folly hide their face."

Beau Brummell in his consulship at Caen could hardly have been more bored or out of place than the gay George Etheredge in his embassy at Ratisbon. But he could produce better poems than this, and Mr. Gosse has printed two examples of his occasional verse which have the critic's

imprimatur for being among the best of his excursions into poetry; as Mr. Gosse points out, the first piece has a curiously Augustan ring about it:—

"Upon the downs when shall I breathe at ease,
Have nothing else to do but what I please,
In a fresh cooling shade upon the brink
Of Arden's spring, have time to read and think,
And stretch, and sleep, when all my care shall be
For health, and pleasure my philosophy?
When shall I rest from business, noise and strife,
Lay down the soldier's and the courtier's life,
And in a little melancholy seat
Begin at last to live and to forget
The nonsense and the farce of what the fools call great?"

This is in a very different vein from the old Etheredge; time and Ratisbon had at last dominated his eager, restless, volatile mind, and we have him wooing solitude like Gray with the gentle melancholy of Collins. However, it was but a passing fancy, and in the following year the influence of Julia is responsible for this missive being sent to Lord Middleton:—

"Garde le secret de ton ame,
Et ne te laisse pas flatter,
Qu'Iris espargnera ta flamme,
Si tu luy permets d'éclater;
Son Humeur, à l'amour rebelle,
Exile tous ses doux désirs,
Et la tendresse est criminelle
Qui veut luy parler en soupirs.

"Puis que tu vis sous son empire,
Il faut luy cacher ton destin,
Si tu ne veux le rendre pire
Percé du trait de son dédain ;
D'une rigueur si délicate,
Ton cœur ne peut rien espérer,
Dérobe donc à cette ingrate
La vanité d'en trionfer."

By this it will be seen that Etheredge had not forgotten in his Germanic fastness the language and turn of thought which he had imbibed in his five years' sojourn in the France of his predilection.

The inditing of such trifles and the composing of long gossipy letters to his friends in England were, indeed, his chief sources of amusement, although he seems to have found no little solace in the bottle ; but this, if it gave him temporary pleasure, appears to have affected his former comely appearance which, we are told, was spoiled by "intemperance and the exceeding irregularity of his career." From being "a fair, slender, and genteel man," he degenerated into a puffy, bloated, middle-age, in which one of his chief delights was recalling the exploits of earlier days and remembering those feats of gallantry of which he was no longer capable. "Remind my Lord Dorset," he writes on one occasion, "how he and I carried two draggled-tail nymphs one bitter frosty night over the Thames to Lambeth."

But such glimpses of Cytherea are not the only ones we get from the Etheredge correspondence, and if the poet liked in retrospect to dally with thoughts of Venus he also kept himself duly attuned to Apollo's harmonies. He receives letters from Dryden, whom he terms "General Dryden—an expert captain, but fitter for execution than counsel;" and in the midst of complaints from the Treasury because of his spending more than his allowance, refusals from the authorities to grant his request for leave of absence to visit the Count de Thun at Munich, and even one great fête which he gives to the Electoral College (which, by the way, had invited itself to the Embassy) when the attendant deep potations laid him by the heel and resulted in a severe ague, he has the consolation of writing about higher things and can with delight read *The Hind and the Panther* by glorious John, which a friend, Mr. Wynne, had sent him. Indeed his interest in literature, especially dramatic literature, remained unabated, and although among his books the only plays to be found were those of Shakespeare and Molière, he expresses anxiety for others, and in one letter remarks that "though I have given up writing plays, I should be glad to read a good one, wherefore pray let Will. Richards send me Mr. Shadwell's as soon as it is printed, that I may know what is being done." Whether *The Squire of Alsatia*, the piece here indicated, ever reached him is uncertain.

The letter in which this request occurs contains one or two other self-revealing passages. "Mrs. Barry," he remarks for instance, "bears up as well as I myself have done; my poor Lord Rochester could not weather the Cape, and live under the line fatal to puling constitutions." He has by this time become rather a *laudator temporis acti*, and we find him regretting to hear that Sedley has mended his ways (if he really ever did mend them), and that Dorset had become a model husband. Even he himself has suffered (or benefited by) a sea-change, and he exclaims: "Nature, you know, intended me for an idle fellow, and gave me passions and qualities fit for that blessed calling; but fortune has made a changeling of me, and necessity now forces me to set up for a fop of business." I think, as a matter of fact, that he remained the fop of literature to the end. But he justified himself in that he not merely lived his *Man of Mode*, but wrote it; that he not merely produced the ephemeral verse with which his letters are interspersed, but also wrote at least two lyrics whose beauty satisfied the fastidious taste of Locker and which are within the reach of all, in the pages of *Lyra Elegantiarum*.

Nowadays the Restoration dramatists have as lazy a time of it as even Etheredge could wish. They enjoy undisturbed repose on the shelves, and after Leigh Hunt brought them down from

their fastnesses for a time they have returned to their seclusion. The fact is they are too much of their period; too subtle to catch us, as the fuller-blooded Elizabethans can catch us; they have no mighty lines like Marlowe's, no almost Russian love of dreariness and tragedy like Webster; they are like delicate (the word seems an anachronism, I grant) pieces of china, and one hesitates to touch such brittle stuff. But the world (of Whitehall and the Parks, with a background of cits) as Gentle George knew it, is there compact of glittering beaux and complaisant belles; and the sparkle of its wit, the happy turn of its phrasing, the essential (west end) humanity of it all, will appeal at least as a change after the emphatic gestures and sturdier manners of a greater and more enduring art.

. . . . . .

As I have said or implied, it is to Mr. Gosse that we owe a quite new conception of much of Etheredge's life; indeed, of a conception of it at all; for before he turned over the Letter Book and wrote his article on it, all sorts of mystery and mistakes were current with regard to the writer. One most important error, for instance, has been rectified through the discovery of this precious manuscript. If there was one outstanding event in Etheredge's life which was supposed to be authentic it was the fact that he closed his career by falling downstairs and breaking his

neck at Ratisbon, in a polite but drunken endeavour to see some guests to their carriage. We now know that there is not the least ground for this report ; in fact he does not appear to have died at Ratisbon at all, for the Secretary to whom I have before alluded states that after a stay of three and a half years in that place Etheredge went to his beloved Paris, unable, it would seem, longer to endure the unsympathetic atmosphere of the formal German town. If, as the Secretary states, he passed much of his time in visiting all the alehouses of Ratisbon accompanied by his servants, it is not improbable that a scandalised municipality may have petitioned for his removal. In any case he appears to have been the most inappropriate and unconventional ambassador who ever left our shores to uphold the dignity of his country in a foreign land, or as a wit once put it, " to lie abroad for the good of his country." Not lying, but a too determined frankness was Etheredge's trouble. What he did at Paris and after is wrapt in a " mustry," like Yellowplush's birth. It would appear that he left Ratisbon in the spring of 1689, and between that date and his death we know nothing. Mr. Gosse quotes John Dennis who in 1722 remarked of Etheredge that he had then been dead " nearly thirty years," and rather curiously deduces from this that he died in or about 1693. But thirty years from 1722 takes us back to 1692, and

"nearly thirty years" may well indicate 1691. As a confirmation that this year was actually the date of Etheredge's death, we have the entry in Narcissus Luttrell's diary, which incidentally shows that he died in Paris: "Sir George Etheredge, the late King James's Ambassador to Vienna" (a mistake for Ratisbon, unless Etheredge had been transferred to Austria) "died lately at Paris." This record is dated February, 1691, and seems conclusive.*

The last two years of Etheredge's life, that is from his leaving Ratisbon in March, 1689, till his death in Paris, probably in January, 1691, are a blank—a blank which the imagination can fill with him enjoying those amenities of the capital he loved best and where the best of such things were to be found. One can visualise him as still a fop in his advancing years, making occasional appearances at the Court of Le Roi Soleil, being still better known in the cabarets and hostelries of the city; as thorough a Frenchman in habits and inclination as anyone not born a Parisian could be. Personally I like to think of him loitering in the Tuileries Gardens, haunting the Comédie Française, then domiciled in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, to listen to the plays of his favourite Molière, or occasionally going out to St. Germain to visit his old master in exile

* Among the Secret Service expenses of Charles II and James II is an entry: "To Sir George Etheridge, bounty . . . . £200."

and perhaps to commiserate with him over the disaster of the Boyne which had, in 1690, finally extinguished the hopes of another Restoration. After a full and feverish life one pleases oneself in the thought that such harmless pleasures may have rounded off Etheredge's not immaculate career.

Lady Etheredge, it would seem, however, had no part in the last days of her illustrious (for in view of what he did for the stage he deserves the epithet) husband. If the Dame Mary Etheredge, widow, whose will was proved in February, 1692, is identical with Sir George's wife, then we know that she survived him just a year.

By this lady he had no children. But the fruit of his liaison with Mrs. Barry, the actress, was one daughter, who, however, predeceased her father and therefore never benefited by the six (some say seven) thousand pounds he is said to have settled on her.

In a profligate age, Etheredge was an outstanding example of profligacy; he possessed brilliant parts to which his innate slackness never permitted him fully to do justice; but he has left us three plays and some verse, and when all is said, although he might easily have been a better man, he might, like so many of his compeers, have done worse. Oldys, the antiquary, has recorded that he was "a man of much courtesy and delicate address." Let that stand, for want of more sterling qualities, as his epitaph.

Although it is not here the place to enter into a critical dissertation on Etheredge's plays, I cannot do wrong in quoting what so great a critic as Hazlitt has to say about them, and I give his words as a pendant to this sketch of their writer :—

" The plays of Etheredge are good for nothing, except *The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter*, which is, I think, a more exquisite and airy picture of the manners of that age than any other extant. Sir Fopling himself is an inimitable coxcomb, but pleasant withal. He is a suit of clothes personified. Dorimont (supposed to be Lord Rochester) is a genius of grace, gallantry and gaiety. The women in this courtly play have much the look and air (but something more demure and significant) of Sir Peter Lely's beauties. Harriet, the mistress of Dorimont, who " tames his wild heart to her loving hand," is the flower of the piece. Her natural untutored grace and spirit, her meeting with Dorimont in the Park, bowing and mimicking him, and the luxuriant description which is given of her fine person, altogether form one of the *chef-d'œuvres* of dramatic painting." *

To this may be added Dr. Doran's description of what the plays of Etheredge did to stamp the manners and customs of the people of the fashionable world in the days of Charles II. " How," he writes, " they dressed, talked, and

* *Lectures on the English Comic Writers.*

thought; what they did, and how they did it; what they hoped for, and how they pursued it; all this, and many other exemplifications of life as it was then understood, may be found especially in the plays of Etheredge, in which there is a bustle and a succession of incidents, from the rise to the fall of the curtain. But the fine gentlemen are such unmitigated rascals, and the women—girls and matrons—are such unlovely hussies, in rascality and unseemliness quite a match for the men, that one escapes from their wretched society, and a knowledge of their one object and the confidences of the abominable creatures engaged therein, with a feeling of a strong want of purification, and of that ounce of civet which sweetens the imagination."*

* *Their Majesties' Servants.*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY.

THE name of Sedley is generally bracketed with those of Rochester and Etheredge, forming a sort of triology of literary rakishness, as representative of that combination of the libertine and the man of letters which was almost peculiar to the period of the Restoration. It recalls that light amorous verse which flitted gracefully between the more solemn and didactic movements of Dryden's muse and the satiric audacities of Marvell's lines. A Cytherean air plays about the name like a lambent flame whose soft radiance illuminates without destroying it. It conjures up those inimitable lyrics which run like silver threads through the *rose du Barry* background of Caroline poetry; and Sir Charles himself seems to flit, complacent and radiant, across the page that finds itself rather wonderingly between those on which are inscribed the impressive names of Milton and Dryden. There is an air

of graceful amateurishness about the product of Sedley's pen; but it is apparent rather than real, and is the result of the gay and profligate man of fashion overshadowing the muse which waited, sedulously attendant, on his more insistent occupations. Many literary men have been men of fashion. Sedley was a man of fashion who was also a literary man. The difference is obvious.

Charles Sedley was the son of Sir John Sedley, who is only known as a link in the baronetage, and grandson of that Sir William Sedley who possesses a personal distinction in having founded the Sedleian chair of Natural Philosophy at Oxford. Sir John had married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Henry Saville, the erudite Provost of Eton, so that through both his grandfathers Charles Sedley inherited brains and ability. Waller wrote Lady Sedley's epitaph, and from this we learn that she was "early wise and lasting fair," and that—

> "All that her father knew or got,
> His art, his wealth, fell to her lot."

so that it would seem that she was both wealthy and wise.

Charles was born in Shire Lane, Fleet Street, where his father had a house, in 1639, and was baptized at St. Clement's Danes. At the age of seventeen he entered Wadham College* (March 22nd, 1656) where, as we have seen, Rochester was to

* Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses*, vol. iv, p. 732.

become a student four years afterwards. At that time Wilkins was Warden, and among Sedley's contemporaries may be recorded William Lloyd, afterwards Bishop of St. Asaph and one of the famous "Seven Bishops" of James II's persecution, and Lord Lovelace, one of the first men of note to declare for William III and at whose residence at Bisham so much intrigue went on relative to the invitation sent to "the little Dutchman."†

After going down from the University, Sedley appears to have retired to his father's place, and there for a time we lose him. At that period of his life simple bucolic pleasures probably appealed to him more than they did at a later time. He had not yet been vitiated by the atmosphere of Whitehall, or seduced by its denizens into those profligate courses which were afterwards to stamp him as one of the most licentious figures in a licentious environment. At this era of his life few would probably have imagined that not many more years were to elapse before he had entered on that course of dissipation which has enabled Macaulay to describe him, and to describe him justly, as "one of the most brilliant and profligate wits of the Restoration." According to Jesse it was not till some seven years after the

† For information as to Sedley at Wadham I am indebted to the present Warden, the Rev. J. Wells, M.A., who has kindly searched the College books, and who further informs me that Sedley made a gift of plate to Wadham.

return of Charles II from exile that Sedley first appeared at Whitehall. Had this been so he would, unlike Rochester who joined the gay Court when he was yet a youth, have been nearing his thirtieth year when he became one of that band of idle, dissipated wits who helped to charm the King's ample leisure. But as a matter of fact there is every reason to believe that the famous "frolic" (to let it down with the light but hardly suitable epithet that has been applied to it) took place after Sedley had been introduced to the Court at Whitehall; and as this circumstance occurred in 1663 it is pretty certain that Sedley could not have been more than twenty-four when he appeared there. Certainly he was old enough to know better, but hardly more than a youth, if this is any excuse, when he made himself notorious in Bow Street.

His success at Court was marked and instantaneous, and it is not too much to say that he was at once courted for his society and marked out for his wit beyond the majority of his competitors. Charles especially favoured him and so delighted in his amusing conversation that on one occasion he is said to have exclaimed that "Nature had given Sedley a patent to be Apollo's viceroy." One wonders what Apollo would have had to say, had Sedley really represented him, about that episode which so long as the poet's name survives will attach to it, marking him

Engraved by C Rolls

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY.

and his companions as among the most scandalous representatives of a period that was in itself essentially debased. The complete details of that incident will never probably be known. And it is just as well they should not be. Anthony à Wood has left an account of it which cannot be repeated, although the curious can find it set forth in his *Athenae Oxonienses*, where so many curious anecdotes are hidden away among the dry-as-dust records of the members of Oxford University both illustrious and, save through the antiquary's diligence, forgotten.

In those days there was a certain famous tavern in Bow Street known as The Cock, kept by a woman called "Oxford Kate." It was "over against" this tavern that Wycherley and his first wife the Countess of Drogheda lodged—where, by the way, according to Dennis, "if he at any time were with his friends he was obliged to leave the windows open, that the lady might see there was no woman in the company, or she would be immediately in a downright raving condition." To this tavern one day in the summer of 1663 came Sir Charles Sedley, Lord Buckhurst and Sir Thomas Ogle. The bottle passed briskly, and before long they were all (and in view of their subsequent behaviour it is only fair to state the fact) hopelessly intoxicated. Sedley, who seems to have taken a leading part in the affair, first stripped himself, the others following suit. They

then appeared on the balcony, and after exposing themselves in all sorts of fantastic attitudes, simulating postures of a more than questionable character, and going through performances which are not usually associated with publicity, except perhaps by such unconventional children of nature as the less sophisticated Neapolitans, they proceeded—at least Sedley certainly did—to make an oration to the large crowd that had by this time assembled, in which indecency and blasphemy fought for mastery. As a proof of the lengths to which these well-born, well-educated, talented young fools went, even the low denizens of the neighbouring slums, who formed the larger part of their audience, were scandalised and disgusted at the scene, and a rush was made at the tavern-door with the object of wreaking vengeance on the three performers. So determined was the mob that it was only after a long and desperate fight that Sedley, Buckhurst and Ogle were rescued from its clutches; indeed, all three nearly lost their lives as they had successfully lost their characters. They were duly apprehended by the authorities and carried off to the Court of Common Pleas.

Pepys, who heard everything, was told by Batten certain details concerning the subsequent trial; and on July 1st he writes that at Sir William Batten's, at the Trinity House, "after dinner, we fell a-talking, Mr. Batten telling us

of a late trial of Sir Charles Sedley the other day before my Lord Chief Justice Foster and the whole bench, for his debauchery a little while since at Oxford Kate's. It seems my Lord and the rest of the judges did all of them round give him a most high reproofe; my Lord Chief Justice saying that it was for him and such wicked wretches as he was that God's anger and judgments hung over us, calling him sirrah many times. It seems they have bound him to his good behaviour, there being no law against him for it, in £5,000. It being told that my Lord Buckhurst was there, my Lord asked whether it was that Buckhurst that was lately tried for robbery, and when answered Yes, he asked whether he had so soon forgot his deliverance at that time, and that it would have more become him to have been at his prayers, begging God's forgiveness, than now running into such courses again."*

Anthony à Wood gives other details of the trial and records some of Sedley's replies to the Judge's interrogatories, in which his impudence only equalled his indecency of language. When asked if he had read *The Complete Gentleman* he merely answered in an offensive way, that he believed he had read more books than the Lord Chief Justice.

Although Pepys does not mention it Sedley and his two companions were heavily fined. Unable to pay, they employed Henry Killigrew

* See my notice of Lord Buckhurst for an account of this incident.

to try to persuade the King to get the fine remitted. Charles, who was too astute to interfere, especially in such a case, with the machinery of justice, refused to do anything of the kind; whereupon the culprits had the audacity to suggest that the money should be forthcoming from the Royal Exchequer, and if it can be believed the easy-going monarch agreed. It is said, however, that Killigrew and another who had begged it kept the money for themselves!

Men like Sedley and Rochester, Buckhurst and Etheredge were often enough the protagonists in drunken broils at the taverns in Bow Street and Covent Garden and elsewhere. These lively young gentlemen were called "Hectors" and were a terror to law-abiding citizens, as they were constantly picking quarrels or making some excuse for unprovoked attacks on harmless people. In *The Morning Ramble, or The Town Humour*, of 1672, the scenes are laid "at the Rose Tavern," which so constantly witnessed these disorderly conflicts that Shadwell in his comedy of *The Scowrers*, produced some twenty years later, writes of the well-born blackguards who affected it: "They were brave fellows indeed! In those days a man could not go from the Rose Tavern to the Piazza once, but he must venture his life twice."*

* It was after leaving the Cock Tavern in Bow Street that Sir John Coventry was set upon and had his nose slit to the bone for making reflections on the King. This outrage resulted in the passing of the Coventry Act (22 and 23 Charles II, c. 1), containing specific provisions against maiming, etc.

Where such characters haunted was a pretty certain place in which to find their female counterparts, and to those taverns all the painted harlots of the neighbourhood resorted, by appointment or on the chance of picking up a Court gallant or some titled young nincompoop who was seeing life from the rural retreat of his own home or the cloistered seclusion of one of the Universities.

Dr. Doran, writing of the stage at this period and its patrons, speaks of Sedley and Etheredge (whom he places together as contemporary dramatists) in no measured terms. Indeed, he says, "two more atrocious libertines than these two men were not to be found in the apartments at Whitehall, or in the streets, taverns, and dens of London. Yet both were famed for like external qualities. . . . Sedley was so refinedly seductive of manner that Buckingham called it "witchcraft," and Wilmot, "his prevailing, gentle art," and he sums up a comparison between Etheredge and Sedley by coming to the conclusion that the latter was the greater *beast* of the two. There is little doubt that this judgment is substantially correct, and there is as little doubt that it was arrived at chiefly through knowledge of the unseemly conduct of Sedley at the Cock Tavern. That incident forms the outward and tangible sign of much in his career probably as offensive but more discreetly hidden from public view.

One may assume that even as licentious a dare-devil as Sedley felt it expedient to lie low for a time after an exploit that had not only disgusted the lower classes of the Metropolis but had even shocked (and it took a good deal to do that) the inhabitants of Whitehall and St. James's. Gossip directed itself into other channels and Sir Charles continued his course of life, in which women and wine had so considerable a share, which was not greatly dissimilar from that of the other rakes of the period. Pepys, in 1667, tells us how, happening to go to the King's Head at Epsom, he hears that Lord Buckhurst and Nelly are lodged next door, and Sir Charles Sedley with them, and how they "keep a merry house." "Poor girl," he adds, "I pity her"; although to be sure his pity is chiefly excited by the fact that she was thus unable to act at the King's House. Later on in the year the old gossip records an astonishing piece of scandal, his informant being his cousin Roger, who told him "as a thing certain, that the Archbishop of Canterbury that now is" (Gilbert Sheldon) "do keep a wench, and that he is as very a wencher as can be"; and he proceeds to relate as a matter of public notoriety that "Sir Charles Sedley had got away one of the Archbishop's wenches from him, and the Archbishop sent to him to let him know that she was his kinswoman, and did wonder that he would offer any dishonour to one related

to him. To which Sir Charles Sedley is said to answer, "Pray tell his Grace that I believe he finds himself too old, and is afraid that I should outdo him among his girls, and spoil his trade." Well may Pepys remark that such a fact with regard to the head of the Church is one of the most astonishing things that he had heard. It would have been had it been a fact; but it is almost certain that there is not a word of truth in the disgraceful charge. Sedley was as ready as he was impudent, and there is no reason to doubt that he invented the whole thing to mask his profligate behaviour to one of the Archbishop's household.

A personal experience which Pepys had of Sedley at the play (it was in February, 1667) shows us something of the manners of the times as well as of Sir Charles in particular, and as such I give the passage *in extenso*.

"To the King's house, to *The Mayds Tragedy*; but vexed all the while with two talking ladies and Sir Charles Sedley; yet pleased to hear this discourse, he being a stranger. And one of the ladies would, and did sit with her mask on, all the play, and being exceeding witty as ever I heard woman, did talk most pleasantly with him; but was, I believe, a virtuous woman, and of quality. He would fain know who she was, but she would not tell; but did give him many pleasant hints of her knowledge of him, by that

means setting his brains at work to find out who she was, and did give him leave to use all means to find out who she was, but pulling off her mask. He was mighty witty, and she also making sport with him very inoffensively, and that a more pleasant rencontre I never heard. But by that means lost the pleasure of the play wholly, to which now and then Sir Charles Sedley's exceptions against both words and pronouncing were very pretty." What a subject for a painter, and how Maclise or Leslie would have delighted in it!

It was about this time that Sedley, of whose lyrical powers there was no doubt (I shall speak of this, the best part of his record, later on), turned his attention to the stage in the character of a playwright. He, in common with Buckingham and Etheredge and Buckhurst and the rest, had long been a patron of the drama, which means that he was accustomed to give vent to his wit at the expense of plays and players, and that he protected many of the actresses who almost invariably sustained a double *rôle* in life's comedy—and tragedy. Of his wit, his happy impromptus, his apt repartees, we have unimpeachable evidence. Shadwell, himself no mean example of the art of witty *persiflage*, once said of him: "I have heard Sedley speak more wit at a supper than all my adversaries putting their heads together could *write* in a year;"

and on one occasion Pepys, being at a performance of a dull and ill-acted play called *The General*, remarks that he happened to sit near Sedley whom he found "a very witty man," and adds how "he did at every line take notice of the dullness of the poet and badness of the action, and that most pertinently," which he (Pepys) was "most mightily taken with."

Sedley's association with the actresses may be taken for granted although his name is not recorded as specifically attached to any particular one, with a single exception—that exception being the lady whom Pepys calls Pegg, but who was really Margaret Hughes, afterwards famous as Prince Rupert's mistress and as sharing with Anne Marshal the distinction of having been the first professional actress, women's parts having hitherto been supported by men, who sometimes kept the audience waiting while they were being *shaved!* Both Margaret Hughes and Anne Marshal were members of Killigrew's company, and the first character assumed under the new fashion was that of Desdemona. An entry in Pepys's Diary for May 8th, 1668, refers to both these actresses as well as a far more famous one than either: "To the King's house," he writes, "where going in for Knipp, the play being done, I did see Beck Marshall come dressed, off the stage, and look mighty fine, and pretty, and noble: and also Nell, in her boy's clothes, mighty pretty.

But, Lord! their confidence! and how many men do hover about them as soon as they come off the stage; and how confident they are in their talk! Here I did kiss the pretty woman newly come, called Pegg, that was Sir Charles Sedley's mistress, a mighty pretty woman, and seems, but is not, modest." Later he goes with Knipp to her lodgings, where Bannister* comes with a song for her, to be interpolated into Sedley's new play.

This play was Sedley's first and best known dramatic production, *The Mulberry Garden*. Pepys had heard of its coming performance from Knipp (she knew everything in the theatrical world) who, however, thought its title would be *The Wandering Ladies*, but was in any case sure that it would be "most pleasant." It was, however, not till four months later that *The Mulberry Garden* came out. Pepys was of course there, a *partie carrée*—Mercer, Mrs. Horsfield, Gayet and himself. They arrived at the King's playhouse before the doors were open; but when they did get in they found many people already come in by private ways into the pit, "it being the first day (May 18th, 1668) of Sir Charles Sedley's new play, so long expected, *The Mulberry Garden*, of whom, being so reputed a wit, all the world do expect great matters." Pepys had had nothing to eat, so having secured his seat he went out

* John Bannister was one of the Waits in St. Giles's in the Fields. Charles II sent him to France to improve his music. Later, he ran a school of music in Whitefriars, and died in 1679.

to the Rose Tavern in Covent Garden and dined alone on a breast of mutton, off the spit. Thus fortified he returned to the theatre, "where the King and Queen, by and by, come, and all the Court; and the house infinitely full." The diarist, however, found the play dull—"nothing extraordinary in it at all, neither of language or design," but "here and there a pretty saying, and that not very many either." What obviously troubled him was that he did not see the King laugh nor pleased from beginning to end, and so greatly did this affect his judgment that he sums up by remarking that he had not been less pleased with a new play in his life than he was with this of Sedley's. Probably the King had other reasons for not being amused. One never thinks he was quite at his ease when the Queen was present. Once, one remembers, he talked in her presence with Lady Castlemaine hanging over a box above, and alarums and excursions were the result. Charles loved the play, but he loved light converse with his female favourites better; and perhaps on this occasion he was debarred from such frivolities. However, although the play was Sedley's best, it was not one to keep the house in a roar, and the isolated good things were probably those borrowed from Molière, on whose *L'École des Maris* parts of it were based.

The fact that Sedley had turned playwright by no means indicated that he had abandoned

his earlier habits of shocking the people. He may have thought that amusing them and scandalising them were synonymous. Anyhow we find him during this very year of grace 1668 figuring in another "frolic" if not quite so outrageous as that at the Cock Tavern at least equally indecent. This was nothing less than stripping naked and in that condition, in which Buckhurst was again his companion, running about the streets. The watchmen tried to make them desist but failed to do so until a free fight had taken place, when, the authorities being successful, Sir Charles Sedley and my Lord Buckhurst were carried off and shut up for the night in the watch-house. Again, as in the Cock Tavern instance, the easy-going King was appealed to, and this time was so ill-advised as to bring pressure to bear on the Lord Chief Justice, no longer Trevor but Keeling, who, not apparently knowing whom to punish, compromised with his professional dignity by punishing—the watchmen! Which, as Pepys indignantly and pertinently remarks, "is a horrid shame."

The Diarist's friend, Pierce, was always a mine of information about such things, and it was from him that the details of this fresh outrage on public morals and on the judicature of the country came. Also it was he who recorded how Charles being at Thetford with Sedley and Buckhurst did make the fiddlers of that town sing them

all the obscene songs they could think of; and how the King staying at Saxham near Bury St. Edmunds was so drunk, again with Sedley and Buckhurst, that when Lord Arlington came down on State business his sacred Majesty was not in a condition either to give him an audience or to have understood his remarks had he done so!

. . . . . .

It was during the year succeeding the production of *The Mulberry Garden* that an incident occurred, arising out of Sedley's connection with the stage, which indicates that brutality of conduct which it is but fair to say was not peculiar to him; a brutality of outlook, so to phrase it, indicating the attitude of many members of the upper classes towards those in a lower stratum. It appears that between Sedley and Kynaston, the impersonator of girls' parts before those were taken by women, there was a strong facial resemblance. Kynaston, not unnaturally proud of being mistaken for so undoubted a man of fashion, dressed himself the more nearly to look the part; and went about the town apeing the style and manners of his notorious model. This was a presumption which Sedley not only resented but determined to punish. He therefore hired a ruffian to accost Kynaston in St. James's Park as if he really believed he was speaking to Sedley himself, and to give him a sound thrashing. This was duly accomplished, but whether Kynaston

proved too much for his adversary or whether the bully was not so physically strong as was supposed, certain it is that the chastisement was not particularly effective, and Kynaston, realising the trick, attempted to turn the tables on Sedley by mimicking him on the stage. The infuriated baronet determined that there should be no mistake about the punishment this time. Accordingly he employed three or four sturdy fellows to fall upon the unfortunate actor on January 30th, 1669, when they so unmercifully beat him that he was unable to perform for at least a week, and probably congratulated himself that he was ever able to act at all after the encounter. The play from which Kynaston was for a time debarred from appearing in was *The Heiress*, and Pepys, hoping to have seen it on February 1st, 1669, found on arriving at the theatre that there was to be no performance. It is a curious fact that Sedley had already introduced an incident of the caning of one man in mistake for another in *The Mulberry Garden*, produced, as we have seen, in the preceding year. Kynaston was well enough to act in *The Island Princess* on the following February 9th, and Pepys, who then saw him, praises his impersonation as much as he does the play itself.

If Sedley really was like Kynaston in features he must have been at this time a much better looking man than his later portraits lead one to

imagine, for the actor was considered one of the handsomest men of the day, and it was owing to the delicacy of his features that he made up so admirably as a girl. Colley Cibber has preserved an amusing anecdote with regard to Kynaston's female impersonations. On one occasion Charles II arrived at the theatre before the actors were ready to begin. A messenger was sent behind the scenes to find out the cause of the delay when the manager came hurrying to the royal box and told the King that the queen (the part Kynaston was performing) was not yet shaved; a reply that highly amused Charles, whom any other excuse would probably have annoyed. Cibber further relates that Kynaston was so beautiful a youth that the ladies of quality delighted in taking him dressed in his girl's clothes in their carriages when they drove in Hyde Park after the play.*

To return to Sedley. He brought out two more plays, each at long intervals. The first was *Anthony and Cleopatra*, which was produced at the Duke's Theatre in 1677,† and in which, as Doran says, a single incident in Shakespeare's eponymous play is spun out into five acts. The second was called *Bellamira, or The Mistress*, founded in part on Terence's *Eunuchus*. This was

* Cibber's *Apology*.

† The Marquis of Worcester, writing to his wife on March 17th, 1677, mentions that this play had then been often acted. *Beaufort MSS.*, R. Hist. Commission.

first performed at the King's Theatre in 1687. The fact that it satirized Lady Castlemaine's dominating passion, and incidentally the gallantry of Churchill, exposed the author to no danger, as it probably would have done at an earlier time; for Charles was dead, and Lady Castlemaine (or the Duchess of Cleveland as she then was) had fallen from power long since.

The first representation of *Bellamira*, however, was attended by an incident which might have proved more disastrous than the fury of a satirized courtesan, for during the performance the roof of the theatre fell in, and Sedley himself appears to have nearly lost his life through the accident. Sir Fleetwood Shepherd, one of the band of wits who surrounded the Merry Monarch, told the author that there was so much fire in his piece that it blew up the poet, the audience and the building. "No," replied Sedley, "the play was so heavy that it demolished the theatre and buried the author among his own rubbish." Sedley seemed doomed to such mishaps, for some years previously, as we have seen in the notice of Etheredge, Sir Charles had his skull cracked through the collapse of the roof of the Haymarket Tennis Court, and for some days it was thought that the injury would prove fatal.

In addition to the three plays mentioned, certain other dramatic pieces emanated from Sedley's pen. One of these was called *Beauty*

the Conqueror, a piece of no particular merit; and he was part author with Waller, Buckhurst and Godolphin, of a play called *Pompey the Great*, which was little more than a translation of one of Corneille's dramas. Either the adapters had done their work indifferently, or Pepys's critical powers were (as they often were, indeed) on this occasion wanting; for the Diarist calls it "a mean play," and little of Corneille's undiluted achievements can properly be termed that.

Sedleys' plays are to-day forgotten. One of them, indeed, is known by name, but chiefly I suspect because it possesses a topographical interest—the Mulberry Garden, which gives its name to it, having in Caroline days been part and parcel of the grounds attached to Buckingham Palace. Consequently, no account of that building or of the mansions which preceded it can be considered complete without a reference to the mulberry garden which, originally formed by James I as an orchard of mulberry trees in furtherance of his scheme for the introduction of silkworms into this country on a large scale, became in course of time a place of public entertainment, a sort of precursor of the Ranelagh and Vauxhall of later days. Dr. King, in his *Art of Cookery*, refers both to the palace and the use of the gardens by Sir Charles as a *mise-en-scene*:—

> "A Princely Palace in that space does rise,
> Where Sedley's noble muse found Mulberries."

Yet, if Sedley's plays are forgotten, his lyrics remain to attest his power in this form of composition—lyrics which at their best can rival, or almost rival, the incomparable productions of Lovelace and Waller in this direction. It is difficult to associate the known profligacy and indecency of many of these Caroline libertines with the graceful, tender verses which they could on occasion indite; or rather it would be if one overlooked the fact that there are in most natures two sides, and that often men of the loosest, most immoral, lives have written poetry from which all sensuality is banished and which breathes the very essence of ethereal passion. We have seen what Sedley's life was. Some of its incidents can only be adumbrated in a vague way, and yet the man who could disport himself at the Cock Tavern to the disgust of the lowest, and could race through the streets in a state of nudity, could sit down and write such an imperishable thing as this

To Celia :—

"Not, Celia, that I juster am
Or better than the rest;
For I would change each hour, like them
Were not my heart at rest.

But I am tied to very thee
By every thought I have:
Thy face I only care to see,
Thy heart I only crave.

All that in woman is adored
In thy dear self I find—
For the whole sex can but afford
The handsome and the kind.

Why then should I seek further store,
And still make love anew?
When change itself can give no more,
'Tis easy to be true."

In his plays, too, Sedley has interpolated some charming songs, such as that in *Bellamira*, beginning :—

" Thyrsis, unjustly you complain,
And tax my tender heart
With want of pity for your pain,
Or sense of your desert."

or that in *The Mulberry Garden*, addressed *To Chloris*, " a very young lady." But it is, perhaps, by the famous verses *To Phillis* :—

" Phillis is my only joy,
Faithless as the winds or seas,
Sometimes cunning, sometimes coy,
Yet she never fails to please " ;

and so on, that Sedley is to-day best remembered as a lyricist. There is a charm and distinction about such verses as this which do much to atone for the irregularity of their author's life and the many scandalous transactions in which in his hot youth he took part. This was not, however, peculiar to him. Rochester and Etheredge and others can be indicated as examples of how these

amazing Restoration wits in the intervals of their raging passions could coo it gently as any sucking doves.

. . . . . .

Sedley was now about forty-eight, and having been sowing his wild oats for some twenty odd years he rather suddenly became serious—if the fact of seeking election as one of the Nation's representatives can be regarded as a proof of sobriety. He sat in Charles's last Parliament as member for New Romney, in Kent. On the accession of James II he still represented this place, but he was chiefly notable for his opposition to the Court. This opposition was dictated by personal, rather than national, feelings. It is well-known that his daughter, Catherine Sedley, afterwards Countess of Dorchester, was the mistress of the new King. It seems strange, considering what we know of Sedley's life, but it is a fact, that this connection aroused in him the most bitter and disgusted feelings, and he took no pains to conceal his anger.

Catherine Sedley was a worthy daughter of such a man as Sir Charles. Sedley had been married* when he was but eighteen to Catherine, daughter of Earl Rivers, and this lady was the mother of the more notorious Catherine. The latter was exceedingly witty and exceedingly profligate, and she has been described as having

* On February 23rd, 1657, at St. Giles in the Fields.

more wit than beauty, and more indelicacy than either. Her lack of personal charms was no deterrent to a man like James, whose mistresses were so invariably ugly that his brother Charles once remarked that he thought he must have had them given him by his confessor as so many penances.

It is known that James on his accession determined to put an end to this *liaison*, and to mollify as far as might be the discarded lady he created her Baroness Darlington and Countess of Dorchester for life. Having to vacate her apartments at Whitehall she removed to a house in St. James's Square,* until she set out for Ireland, where the King had decided she should permanently take up her residence. On her way thither she suffered a miscarriage, which was followed by a serious illness. Returning to St. James's Square her connection with James was for a short time renewed; but the tears of the Queen, and perhaps even more the threats of his confessor, finally caused the King to put an end to the connection. As a type of her style of *wit*, the story is told that, happening to meet the Duchess of Portsmouth and Lady Orkney (the mistress of William III) at one of the drawing-rooms in the early years of George I's reign, she exclaimed: "——! who would have

* No. 21, Winchester House. Arabella Churchill, another of James's mistresses, had previously resided here, during 1676–8.

thought that we three whores would have met here ! "

Lady Dorchester's career* only interests us here in so far as it reacted on her father's political change of front. The question will arise in the minds of the cynical as to whether, not the fact that his daughter was a royal mistress so much as that she was discarded, prompted Sedley in his sudden and furious opposition to James. We may, I think, give him the benefit of the doubt and suppose that however naturally libertine he was in his own conduct, his better feelings were outraged by the scandalous association of his daughter and her royal lover. On one occasion, being asked the reason for his change of feelings towards James, he is said to have replied : " I hate ingratitude ; and therefore as the King has made *my* daughter a Countess I will endeavour to make *his* daughter a Queen." † A queen she certainly became, but how much Sedley had to do with the Revolution of 1688 is not clear. That he took no active part in it although he may have upheld

* In a contemporary letter from Lady Chaworth to her brother, Lord Ros, preserved at Belvoir, mention is made of a quarrel between " Miss Sidley and Sir Carr Scroope," she thinking him the author of a lampoon in which she was described as " as mad as her mother and as vicious as her father."

† Johnson's well known line in response to Sedley's attitude runs :

" And Sedley cursed the form that pleased a king."

That there was a certain amount of justness in Sedley's anti-monarchical feeling is evidenced by the fact that in his clear and forcible *Reflections on our late and present Proceedings in England*, he advises that no drastic action against James should be taken until the disputed question of the Prince of Wales's birth was satisfactorily cleared up.

its principles in Parliament seems pretty certain. Although he may have come to dislike James, he had no special love for William, and in various verses and epigrams he was accustomed to level his sarcasm at the Little Dutchman with no unsparing hand.

Sedley occupied a house in Bloomsbury Square when in London, and he was living there in the January of 1691, for Luttrell records at that time that: "Sir Charles Sedley's house in Bloomsbury Square was lately searched, upon an information that the bishop of Ely was harboured there." When one remembers Sedley's preposterous and scandalous accusation against the Archbishop of Canterbury at an earlier period, it is amusing to read of his residence being considered a likely hiding-place for any ecclesiastic. But the truth is, so great a change had taken place in Sir Charles's attitude towards life in general that the fact of such a suspicion being entertained should not really cause astonishment. Nobody is so proper as your reformed rake, and Sedley's earlier morals were fairly reformed by this time. He seems, too, to have become a *persona grata* with those in power. Luttrell states emphatically (in 1694) that "Sir Charles Sedley will be a viscount of England"; so that there must have been a general idea that this honour would be conferred on him. For some reason it was not; nor did he in the following year succeed in his desire

to become a Knight of the Shire for his old constituency, New Romney, he losing it by one vote to a Mr. Brewer.

During the last decade of Sedley's life little is known of him ; but one thing is certain : whatever efforts he may have made to bring about the fall of James he seems to have gained nothing by the accession of William. Perhaps there was not time enough for the development of royal gratitude (if he had earned any), for he closed his rather hectic career* on August 20th, 1701, at what was later Steele's cottage on Haverstock Hill. Steele, writing to Pope on June 1st, 1712, says : "I am at a solitude, an house between Hampstead and London, wherein Sir Charles Sedley died . . . . It was said of Sir Charles, who breathed his last in this room—

> Sedley has that prevailing gentle art
> Which can with a resistless charm impart
> The loosest wishes to the chastest heart ;
> Raise such a conflict, kindle such a fire
> Between declining Virtue and Desire,
> Till the poor vanquish'd Maid dissolves away,
> In dreams all night, in sighs and tears all day."

That he still represented New Romney at the time of his death is confirmed by Luttrell.†

* The writer of a note included in the Buccleuch MSS. states that Mr. D'Avenant told him that "he was present with Sir Charles Sedley in his last hours, and that he died like a philosopher, without fear or superstition." Historical Manuscripts Commission.

† *Brief Relation* for August 23rd, 1701.

Sedley was sixty-two at the time of his decease. Whether his wife outlived him or not I am unable to say, but it is known that besides the too-famous daughter whom he had by her he left three natural children, a son and two daughters, and on these he settled certain property which he possessed in Kent and Essex, a fact recorded by Oldys, the antiquary, in the MS. notes he made in his copy of Langbaine.

CHARLES SACKVILLE,
EARL OF DORSET.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLES SACKVILLE, EARL OF DORSET.

THE name of Charles Sackville, both under his courtesy title of Lord Buckhurst and his hereditary one of Earl of Dorset, is one we have already met with not infrequently in these pages, as well as in the earlier volume in which the more personal side of Charles II's character was recorded. As a wit, a man of pleasure, a poet and a patron, he occupies a considerable space in the annals of the Court of England after the Restoration ; as a young blood of family too often given over to disorderly conduct and a course of profligacy hardly second to that followed by such men as Sedley and Rochester and Buckingham, he flits across the page of domestic history ; and his ultimate career as a serious statesman has hardly succeeded in obliterating from our minds his earlier phase of libertinism and licentiousness. As has been truly said of him, he was " during the whole of his life the patron

of men of genius and the dupe of women, and bountiful beyond measure to both." In the words of one who has recently written the history of his glorious ancestral home, " he furnished Knole with silver and peopled it with poets and courtesans." *

Pope, who wrote his epitaph which may be read in the church of Withyam in Kent, speaks there of " Dorset, the grace of Courts." But the impartial enquirer is bound to confess that at all events at one period of his life he might more properly have been termed a *dis*grace of the Court, had that Court been capable of being further disgraced than it was by the actions and talk of its members.

Charles Sackville came of a race which had for long been illustrious and had always been comely, so that when Matthew Prior spoke of him as being in form and figure " strong, proportionable, beautiful," and Macky termed him " one of the finest gentlemen in England in the reign of Charles II," we may be certain, were not the fact also proved by Kneller's well-known portrait, that he had inherited the good looks, as we know he did the poetical talents, of his forbears.

He was the great-great-grandson of Thomas Sackville, created Earl of Dorset by James I, who heralded the literary splendour in which Eliza-

* See *Knole and the Sackvilles*, by Miss Victoria Sackville-West, for a vivid and delightful account of the place and its owners.

beth's reign closed, and who as the part author of *Gorbuduc* and the *Mirrour of Magistrates* takes his place as one of the pioneers of British dramatists and as one of the most prominent of British poets. Charles Sackville's fame as a poet* has been overshadowed by that of his great ancestor; and rightly so, for his gentle lyrical vein runs thin beside the full-blooded outpourings of the Elizabethan. At the same time, if we do not institute comparisons between a rivulet and a river, we may properly do so between a number of brooks; and the brook of Dorset certainly ran as crystal-clear as did that of Rochester or of Sedley. And besides this, Charles Sackville had qualities of heart and mind which were hardly present in Rochester's constitution, and certainly not at all in Sedley's. He was a friend in distress, a patron of merit; as a literary man he was devoid of envy and as a politician of malice, and his manners were as charming as his person was graceful. And yet there can be no gainsaying the fact that he was a rake. Not one of those consistent examples of the *genus* who carry into middle life the hot-headed character of fiery and untameable youth; not one of those whose passions are only extinguished by incapacity and who impotently strive to continue a life of pleasure for which Nature

* "I have heard," writes Addison, in *The Spectator*, "that the late Lord Dorset, who had the greatest wit tempered with the greatest candour, and was one of the finest Criticks as well as the best Poets of his Age, had a numerous collection of old English Ballads, and took a particular Pleasure in the Reading of them."

had shewn them no longer capable; but rather one of those who have indulged in all sorts of mad frolics in their youth and have passed from the storm and stress of passionate desire and unbridled licence to the undisturbed calm of philosophic age.

It will not here be necessary to pass in review with any particularity the more serious part of Sackville's career, although to complete the vignette it must at least be glanced at. Rather shall I try to shew what a figure he made at the Court of the Merry Monarch, and on what incidents his inclusion among the Rakes of the Restoration is based. It is rather like producing something similar to a miniature such as the great Cooper sometimes contrived: certain features must be fully drawn and coloured, and the rest left vaguely indicated.

Charles Sackville was born on January 24th, 1638, and as being the eldest son of Richard Sackville by Lady Frances Cranfield, sister and heiress of Lionel, third Earl of Middlesex,* inherited the courtesy title of Lord Buckhurst when his father succeeded to the title of Earl of Dorset in 1652 on the death of *his* father, the friend and supporter of Charles I. Loyalty was hereditary in the family and in course of time Lord Buckhurst became one of Charles II's special

* Whose estates he inherited. The Earldom of Middlesex was conferred upon him in 1675." He is said to have obtained this Earldom, together with expenses out of pocket, in return for the surrender of Nell Gwynn to his sovereign." Vicary Gibbs: *The Complete Peerage.*

favourites. During the twenty-two years that elapsed between his birth and the Restoration, Buckhurst was educated by private tutors (Jennings, who went abroad with him, among them), and by one of those grand tours of Europe which were then regarded, and rightly, not only as a component part of the education of a young man of family but as an almost necessary part of his outfit for life as a man of fashion and extra-insular intelligence.

The Restoration, which revealed so many strange aspects of life and developed the character of so many budding profligates, had a curious influence on Lord Buckhurst. Till it occurred he appears to have been a more or less sedate young gentleman, at least no stories are current, either concerning his youth or his Continental period, as we may call it, indicating that he was for a time to become as licentious in his conduct as Sedley or as notorious for his drunken orgies as Rochester. Even at the Restoration the fact that he sought and obtained election to Parliament as a representative of East Grinstead, and in Parliament gave proof of no ordinary capacity, and also obtained a colonelcy in a Foot Regiment, led many to suppose him a serious person and one likely to make a name, independently of the great one he bore, as a statesman. His later life did, indeed, confirm this anticipation in no small degree. But there occurred a period when he

departed so utterly from his earlier behaviour and gave so little promise of his later, that for a time observers might well have been forgiven if they regarded him as a dissipated libertine destined to tread the primrose path of dalliance in company with so many whose actions scandalised their contemporaries and whose memories have come down to succeeding generations sullied by all kinds of disgraceful actions.

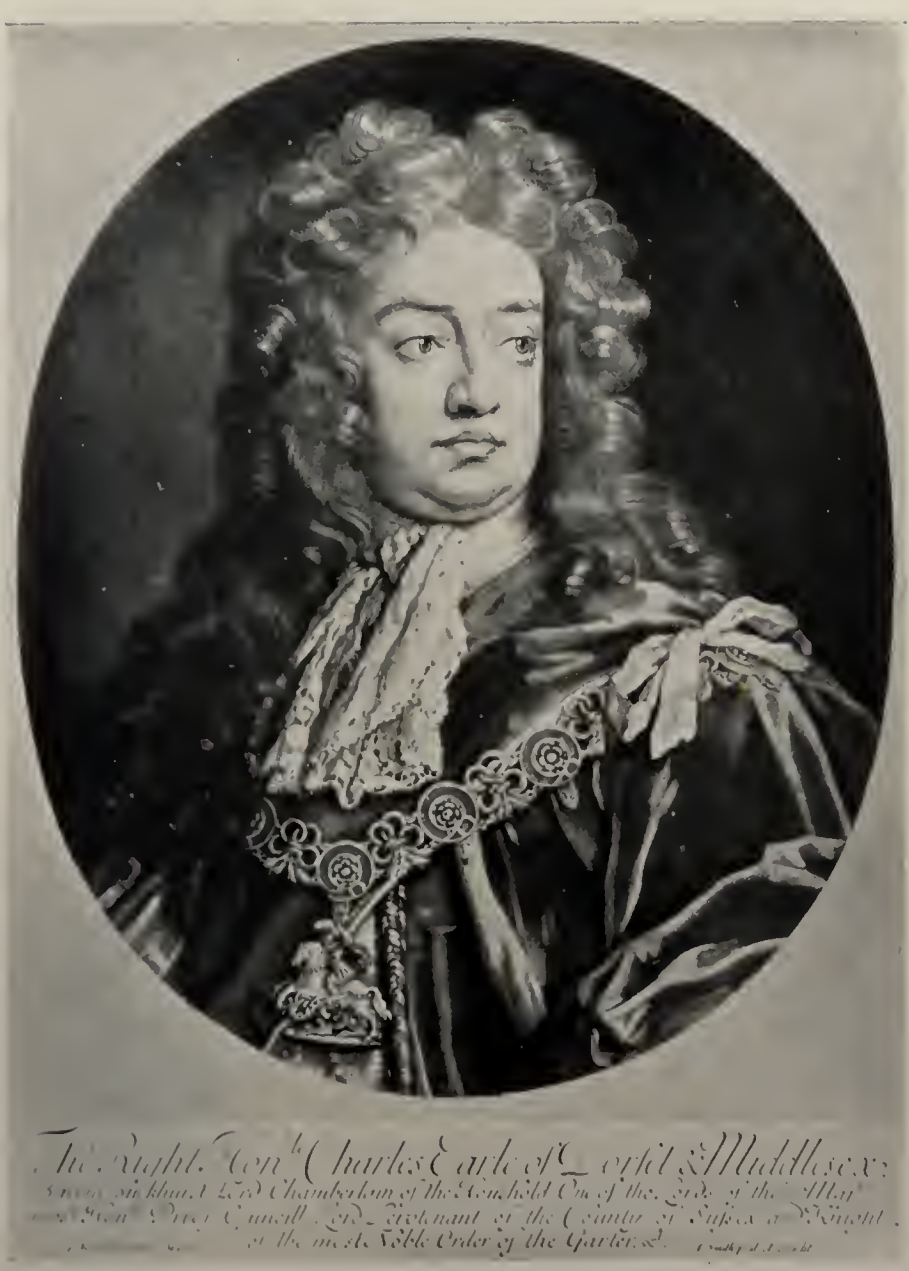
Buckhurst at this time had really no predilection for public life. Business was distasteful to him, and the company of wits far more to him than that of politicians, just as the charms of the lighter forms of literature attracted him much more than did the perusal of statutes and the investigation of parliamentary procedure. To crown all, the King took a special liking to him. Good-looking, well-bred, informed by his foreign travel with varied information, and, above all, witty, he was just the young courtier who was likely to appeal to a man who loved sauntering with an agreeable and amusing companion at his elbow, but whose very good humour and condescension were fatal to all but the feather-brained, the idle and the innately vicious. Had Charles been a different sort of monarch, had his Court been a different kind of Court, it is probable that many of those whose names are synonymous with vice and dissoluteness would have come down to us unaccompanied by the *aura* of profligacy

which now surrounds and obscures the better characteristics which so many of them possessed.

As the heir to a great title Buckhurst was marked out for Courtly honours, even at his then early age. He was created joint Master of Ashdown Forest, joint Steward of the Honour of Aquila and Pevensey Castle, joint Bailiff of the Duchy of Lancaster in the county of Sussex, and joint Master of Broyle Park and Ranger of Ringmer Woods in the year of Restoration. All these were subsidiary offices, but they were earnests of more to come, and they were distinctions that could safely be conferred on a young and untried man. More important from a decorative point of view was his appointment (1669) as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King. Such a post brought him in close personal touch with the sovereign, and from the bedchamber duties to those of constant companion at Charles's *petits soupers* was but a step. In a word, he became one of those whom the King chose to honour with his most intimate friendship.

Unfortunately for himself, Buckhurst was not one of those young men whose innate gaiety of disposition bubbles up naturally, and who can be irresponsible and gay in the midst of a gay and irresponsible society. An impetus from within was required to unlock his heart and to produce that fountain of wit whose depths were only to be plumbed by adventitious means. The means in

his case was the bottle. Wine not only stimulated him, it was necessary as a key to his wit—and it was only after it had passed freely that he could unrestrainedly take his share in the sayings and doings which titillated the already jaded senses of Majesty and which have given a special character to his personal surroundings. The character which Burnet drew of Buckhurst is so apposite that it may properly be given in this connection : "Lord Dorset," he says—he is writing after Buckhurst had succeeded his father in the title, "was a generous, good-natured man. He was so oppressed with phlegm that till he was a little heated with wine he scarce ever spoke : but he was upon that exaltation a very lively man. Never was so much ill nature in a pen as in his, joined with so much good nature as was in himself, even to excess ; for he was against all punishing, even of malefactors. He was bountiful even to run himself into difficulties : and charitable to a fault ; for he commonly gave all he had about him when he met an object that moved him. But he was so lazy that tho' the King seemed to court him to be a Favourite, he would not give himself the trouble that belonged to that post. He hated the Court, and despised the King when he saw he was neither generous nor tender hearted." Part of this verdict was supported by Buckhurst's character ; something of it is confirmed by Rochester's well known lines that he was :—



THE EARL OF DORSET.

"The best good man with the worst natured muse."

But the closing portion belongs properly to a later period than that at which we have arrived; and so far from hating the Court and despising the King he was during many years following the Restoration a constant *habitué* of the one and a familiar companion of the other. Indeed, there is little doubt that Horace Walpole was correct and in no way overstating the case when he wrote of Buckhurst that "He was the finest gentleman in the voluptuous Court of Charles II, and in the gloomy one of King William." "He had," continues Walpole, "as much wit as his first Master, or his contemporaries Buckingham and Rochester, without the Royal want of feeling, the Duke's want of principles, or the Earl's want of thought. It was not that he was free from the failings of humanity, but he had the tenderness of it too, which made everybody excuse whom everybody loved." There is no doubt that it was the underlying element in Buckhurst of fellow feeling and generosity in deed (if not always in word) which made him generally popular and caused Rochester once to remark that "he did not know how it was, but Lord Dorset might do anything, and yet was never to blame."

But although this immunity attended him at Court, there were several things he did which were held particularly blameworthy by those who were not dazzled by his charm, and who held

stricter notions of right and wrong than did the gay inhabitants of Whitehall and St. James's. Johnson once wrote of Buckhurst that "he was eager for the riotous and licentious pleasures which young men of high rank who aspired to be thought wits at that time imagined themselves entitled to indulge;" and it was only two years after Buckhurst's introduction to Charles's Court that he figures in an escapade which bears out this characteristically Johnsonian utterance. It is thus described by Heath in his well known chronicle:—

"A very unfortunate accident happened. The Lord Buckhurst; his brother, Mr. Edward Sackville; Sir Henry Bellasis, Knight of the Bath, son and heir to the Lord Bellasis; Mr. Bellasis, brother to the Lord Fauconbridge; and Mr. Wentworth, son to Sir George; accompanying an acquaintance* out of town, upon their return, being informed there were highwaymen and thieves on the road, meeting a tanner and suspecting him for one of them, after some resistance made by him, killed him; for this mischance they were arraigned at the King's Bench bar, but by the jury quitted; it not being probable that persons of their estates and quality would set upon a single person to do him injury, but it might happen

* This acquaintance bore the unusual name of Vonon—at least that is how it is spelt by Elizabeth Frasier, who gives an account of the affair in a letter to Mrs. Warmestry, dated February 21st, 1662.

merely by mistake, and good intent of freeing the road."

Such is the account given by Heath. But there were mysterious circumstances connected with the affair which gave it a less favourable complexion in the eyes of many contemporaries. Pepys, for instance, writing on February 22nd, 1662, after noticing the circumstance, adds: "I am much troubled for it, and for the grief and disgrace it brings to their families and friends." That the parties felt it incumbent on them to make a public excuse for their conduct before their trial is proved by the fact that they caused a full statement of the facts to be printed. This was really a repetition of what they had already stated to the Justice of the Peace who first took their depositions. In it they make the dead man, Hoppy by name, confess it was the first time he ever attempted to rob anybody. But there seems to have been pretty clear evidence that he was not out to do anything of the kind; and Pepys voiced the opinion of many when he writes: "But I doubt things will be proved otherwise than they say." The assault took place near Waltham Cross, "within a mile of Hogsden," says another report, and in the *Mercurius Publicus* of the day the writer makes no bones about stating that the tanner was innocent, and indicates that it was a case of murder. If, however, the defendants were honestly satisfied that they had to deal with

a highwayman as they said, there was a certain excuse; although why five active young men could not have apprehended one single-handed without killing him is strange enough. As there appear to have been no witnesses, and as Hoppy was dead, the asseverations of Buckhurst and his companions could not be very easily questioned. The Grand Jury seems to have come to this conclusion, for it brought in a verdict of manslaughter,* and after a certain period of incarceration in Newgate Buckhurst and the rest were allowed to go free. It is significant that in the course of a subsequent trial in which the young nobleman was a protagonist the Lord Chief Justice, asking if the Lord Buckhurst then before him was that Lord Buckhurst lately tried for robbery, and being answered that it was so, asked Buckhurst "whether he had so soon forgot his deliverance at that time, and that it would have more become him to have been at his prayers begging God's forgiveness than now running into such courses again." The solemn admonition here expressed indicates, I think, that the judge regarded the leniency of the sentence as not by any means commensurate with the seriousness of the offence, and that he thought such a lucky escape from a heavier punishment should have by no means been so

* The letter referred to in the previous footnote states that: "The Coroner found it murder, and the King was fain to write to the Jury, or they had all been hanged on Monday next." Thus the reason for the Grand Jury's verdict. R. Hist. Commission Report, *Lindley-Wood MSS.*

disregarded as Buckhurst proved it was by his subsequent conduct.

This fresh outbreak was his share in the scandalous incident at the Cock Tavern, in which Sir Charles Sedley was the leading spirit, the details of which, so far as they can be told, I have already referred to in the previous chapter. So far as one can judge, Buckhurst does not seem to have gone the lengths which Sedley permitted himself on that occasion. At the same time he certainly identified himself with conduct as outrageous and indecent as it is possible to imagine, and the Lord Justice's words were fully deserved.

The fact is that, as I have already indicated, he at this period of his career drank heavily, and if wine, as we are told it did, unloosed his tongue and helped to develop his wit, at the same time it had its usual effect of causing him to lose all restraint and to commit acts alien from his better nature. And here it was that he was differentiated from Rochester and even more so from Sedley, who gloried in their profligacy and often did things when sober which Buckhurst would never have dreamed of doing unless drunk. It was, no doubt, when in this condition that he again shared with Sedley the unenviable notoriety of publicly exposing himself. "The late frolic and debauchery of Sir Charles Sedley and Buckhurst," as Pepys puts it, consisted in these two lively gentlemen "running up and down all the

night, almost naked, through the streets," and bringing their escapade to an end by having a free fight with the watch. They were eventually overpowered and shut up all night, and only the intervention of the King saved them from again appearing in a court of justice.*

Buckhurst's partiality for the bottle and its effects on his conduct, effects once observed by Anthony à Wood, who mentions a party in Paris at the English Ambassador's, where he saw Buckhurst and others "enjoying themselves and talking blasphemy and atheism," are facts established. His association with ladies of easy ethics, Betty Morrice and the rest, was at one time equally notorious; and it was under his protection that Nell Gwynn first began the more decorative portion of her career.

It was in 1667 that Pepys was troubled at the news that "my Lord Buckhurst hath got Nell away from the King's house, and gives her £100 a year, so as she hath sent her parts to the house, and will act no more." The Diarist seems to have been agitated rather at the loss of so piquant a personality to the stage than by the question of morality, which was, after all, one which did not excite special comment in those days. It is from Pepys, who was in the way of hearing all the gossip and was one of the few who have recorded it, too, that we learn that Buckhurst

* See a notice of this episode in the account of Sedley.

and Nelly were then at Epsom, lodging next door to the King's Head tavern, and that in company with Sir Charles Sedley they kept "a merry house" there.

As I have already had occasion to shew, Epsom was at that time a very favourite resort for Londoners of all classes. The *haut ton* went there for what we should now call week-end parties; the citizens spent their Sundays* among its rural haunts. Its waters were regarded as a specific for all kinds of minor ailments; and although the great attraction which now draws its vast multitude to Epsom once a year was not yet in existence, Clay Hill and Mawse's Garden, the King's Head and the New Inn, afforded attractions for a less exacting period than our own. One can well imagine what a merry *ménage* was carried on during the months of July and August by Buckhurst and Sedley, with the help of such a past mistress in the arts of amusement and fun as Nell Gwynn, and no doubt other fair creatures from the theatres or from less reputable haunts. They must have kept the place alive indeed; and we can imagine the guests at the King's Head listening to the songs and laughter that floated out on the summer air from the open windows next door, and perhaps catching a glimpse of the witty, merry little lady who was the fountain of hilarity;

* Pepys had a great day there on Sunday, July 14th, 1667. See his *Diary*.

of the flushed good-looking face of her "protector"; of the reckless dare-devil countenance of the notorious Sedley.

The *liaison* does not appear to have been of long duration, however, for by the close of the month we hear that "Nell is already left by my Lord Buckhurst, and that he makes sport of her and swears she hath had all she could get of him." It was a short life and a merry one with these irresponsible children of an older growth. Whether or not a quarrel put an end to the connection between Buckhurst and Nell Gwynn does not seem quite clear. If so, it may only have been temporary, for we find Beck Marshall calling Nell "Lord Buckhurst's mistress" in the following October. It was an unfortunate remark from a lady with such a reputation as Miss Marshall's, and it produced one of Nell's ready retorts: "I was but one man's mistress," she cried, "though I was brought up in a brothel to fill strong waters to the gentlemen; and you are a mistress to three or four though a Presbyter's praying daughter." * In any case, when Charles "sent for Nelly" in the January of the following year her association with Buckhurst, even if it had lasted till then, ceased; and his one-time mistress became the most famous and the most

* Beck Marshall was the daughter of Stephen Marshall, the Presbyterian minister. See, however, a note by Lord Braybrooke to Pepys's *Diary* for October 26th, 1667.

generally excused member of the seraglio of the amorous King.

To have been strictly chronological I ought to have referred to an incident which took place two years before this, and which not merely indicates Buckhurst's personal courage but enters, curiously enough, into his reputation as a poet. It was usual in those days for all sorts of gay young men to seek adventure in those military or naval expeditions which were constantly taking place. It seems curious nowadays to learn with what ease a gentleman or nobleman of fortune could secure a position in either branch of the servicewithout apparently any previous experience. Particularly strange is this as regards the Navy, into which young courtiers entered for a particular campaign with no credentials but their eagerness and gallantry. Among these had been Rochester, and Buckhurst was also to be numbered among the band. The Fleet was preparing to fight the Dutch in 1665, and we find him, on board under the Duke of York, present at the naval engagement of June 3rd, when the Dutch Admiral Opdam suffered so severe a reverse and lost his life.

We have no record as to how Buckhurst demeaned himself on this occasion. It is probable from his general character that he gave a good account of himself, for bravery and intrepidity were part of his nature. But the traditional

incident that stands out in connection with his presence at the naval battle of June the 3rd is the fact that the best known of his poetical productions is said to have been written the night before the engagement. This song, which begins—

"To all you ladies now on land,
We men at sea indite;
But first would have you understand
How hard it is to write:
The Muses now, and Neptune too,
We must implore to write to you." *

runs to eleven verses, and is too well known to require being set down *in extenso* here. It is enough to remark that if the song had been indited on the eve of a fight it would certainly have been a feat, and "one of the prettiest songs ever made," as Prior calls it, would have possessed an additional claim on our interest. But the inevitable Pepys (who has this in common with King Charles's head, that he can no more be kept long out of pages dealing with the Caroline period than the Holy Martyr could be out of Mr. Dick's Memorial) comes along with his facts and his dates, and shews conclusively that the famous song had been written at least six months before the battle! On one occasion Dr. Johnson mentions having heard from Lord Orrery that Buckhurst had been a week employed on the performance, and that he only retouched and corrected

* Lord Halifax wrote a parody on the poem, the first line of which runs: "To all you Tories far from Court."

it on the evening on which it has been assumed that he dashed off the whole thing. It appears that Buckhurst had been at sea with the Duke of York in the previous year, and the poem may quite conceivably have been first drafted on that occasion.

The matter is not of vast importance. The song is one of those witty, antithetical, rather burlesque productions which can hardly be described as a true lyric, but which was likely, as it did, to catch on in an age less crowded with minor poets than has since been the case, and to have received additional *éclat* from the fact that it was written by one who had hitherto signalized himself in quite other ways and whose quasi-naval achievements gave a sort of factitious character to his productions as a versifier. The fact is, like so many men of that age, Buckhurst, if he did nothing pre-eminently, did many things well; and that is a reason why when his verses, or those of men like Sedley and Rochester and Buckingham, are considered they should be judged not as the product of poets (although they not infrequently impinged on the domain of true poetry) but as the trifles to which active and romantic brains occasionally gave birth.

One may here conveniently say what little requires to be said concerning Buckhurst's other verses. Prior, with absurd partiality, says that there is a lustre about them like that of the sun

in Claude Lorraine's pictures. It is such "eulogy at the gallop," as George Meredith once expressed it to me, that is really the most unfair of all criticism. It raises expectation on tip-toe. Buckhurst's verses cannot bear such laudation; but taken for what they are, they have a certain freshness and sparkle (when they are not indecent) which comes, if not like Claude's sunsets at least like a breath of fresh air through the heated atmosphere of Whitehall. The song, *To Dorinda* (it was addressed to Catherine Sedley) is a pretty trifle, hardly more; *Love its own Reward* contains a dash of that philosophy which is really not philosophic at all, for it depends in its rejection of one form of pleasure on satisfaction from another. Perhaps the verses *To Phillis* are the best in this very slight bundle of poetic property; there is a touch of Lovelace (how incomparably greater a poet!) in them; and were I a maker of anthologies I should be inclined to select this as Buckhurst's best claim to a place on the lower slopes of Parnassus.

For the rest, Buckhurst translated a portion of Corneille's play on Pompey the Great, in conjunction with Waller, Sedley and Godolphin, and produced a few ephemeral poems which as the work of a brilliant courtier as well as of a generous patron had a *succès d'estime* at the time of their appearance, but have been long since forgotten except by students of Caroline literature. It is indeed as a patron that he should be chiefly

remembered in this connection. His interest in literature was not confined to the study of it; he was the generous friend of nearly every man of letters who came in his way. Some of these have become more famous than their patron; many, to-day forgotten, no doubt owed to him the means of livelihood. We have already seen how Prior repaid his notice by a eulogistic and daring comparison; and a greater than Prior was equally effusive. For it was to Dorset that Dryden dedicated his translation of Juvenal, in which the English poet made the satire of the Roman his own, and castigated the manners of the Society of his day with a licence hardly exceeded by Trajan's bard. The long and elaborate *Essay on Satire,* by which the translations (they were not all from Dryden's own hand, as he points out) are preceded, is addressed to the Earl of Dorset (he had succeeded to the title in 1677) in terms which now seem to us fulsome enough, but in which in those days it was usual to write of illustrious noblemen who were also patrons of literature.

"The wishes and desires of all good men," so Dryden begins, "which have attended your lordship from your first appearance in the world, are at length accomplished from your obtaining those honours and dignities which you have so long deserved." This refers to several appointments which had been conferred on Dorset, such as that of Lord Chamberlain in 1689, the

Privy Councillorship of the same year, the office of Keeper of Greenwich Palace, and the Garter which had been given him in 1692. Indeed, when one reads Dryden's praises one must remember that the wild and dissipated Buckhurst had become the sober and dignified Dorset, and therefore when we find the great poet addressing him as " the restorer of poetry, the greatest genius, the truest judge, and the best patron " of the age, the fact indicates a wholesome change in his character ; for even Dryden in an access of gratitude could hardly have stultified himself by using such a phrase to the protagonist of the Epsom incident or the associate in that of the Cock Tavern.

It is curious in this connection to read what Dryden has to say about Dorset at an earlier period. For when he published his poetical *Essay on Satire* in 1679 he inserted in that piece the following fourteen lines on the man whom he was later to hail as a paragon :—

" Thus Dorset, purring like a thoughtful cat,
Married, but wiser puss ne'er thought of that :
And first he worried her with railing rhymes,
Like Pembroke's mastives at his kindest time ;
Then for one night sold all his slavish life,
A teeming widow, but a barren wife.
Swell'd by contact of such a fulsome toad,
He lugg'd about the matrimonial load ;
Till fortune, blindly kind as well as he,
Has ill restored him to his liberty ;

> Which he would use in his old sneaking way,
> Drinking all night and dozing all the day;
> Dull as Ned Howard, whom his brisker times
> Had fam'd for dulness in malicious rhymes."

It is evident that Dorset had not become a patron of Dryden when these lines were written! The passage requires one or two annotations. The "barren wife" refers to the fact that Dorset had in 1674 married the Dowager Countess of Falmouth (née Bagot) who brought him no children, and who died shortly before the *Satire* was written. The Lord Pembroke was the seventh Earl, who had married the Duchess of Portsmouth's sister, Henriette de Keroualle, and who treated her in a consistently brutal manner. The Ned Howard was Edward Howard who wrote some plays: *The Man of Newmarket*, *Six Days' Adventure*, etc., none of which proved successful. He also published an epic poem called *The British Princess*, which was unmercifully castigated by the wits of the day, Rochester, Buckingham, and Dorset himself, producing lampoons upon it.

Much had happened between Dryden's strictures of 1679 and his fulsome adulation of 1693. The fact is that Dorset had proved that a reformed rake can become a very estimable character, and, above all, his original interest in literature and literary men, which had at first been more or less fitful and partial, had now become almost a passion. To him Wycherley owed the success

of his *Plain Dealer*; it was due to his interest that Butler's *Hudibras* (which Pepys "could not away with") became the talk of the town and was introduced into the precincts of Whitehall; and Rymer dedicated to him his *Short View of Tragedy*, and affirmed that it was "principally your countenance that buoyed me up," in his prefatory address. Nor were the mere literary men the only ones who profited by his knowledge or were guided (or affected to be) by his experience. Buckingham, it is well known, would not allow his *Rehearsal* to be produced until it had passed the *imprimatur* of one who may rightly be termed the Mæcenas of the time of Charles II.

Although Pope says of Dorset—

> "Yet soft his nature, though severe his lay,
> His anger moral and his wisdom gay;"

contemporaries record that his anger was often anything but merely moral, and it is Prior who tells us that although his accesses of fury were not infrequent they were succeeded by the calm of reflection, so that his servants used purposely to throw themselves in his way during such times, as they knew by experience that afterwards they would be liberally rewarded for the momentary exposure to his anger.

Although politics are not here our quarry, they cannot be wholly disregarded in the later history of Lord Dorset. He took a prominent part in the Coronation of James II, carrying the

Queen's regalia at that ceremony; but his sympathies were not with the policy or religious attitude of James, and at the Revolution he espoused the cause of William. That monarch rewarded his assistance by giving him the Garter and by other honours, including his reinstatement as Lord Lieutenant of Sussex, of which post James had deprived him in January, 1688, in favour of the Marquis of Powis. Probably the vindictive Stuart had not forgiven him for having in the former reign been one of the bail in £5,000 for Sir William Scrogs, Lord Chief Justice, impeached for high treason.* Luttrell has a curious entry for January, 1688, in the form of an anonymous letter sent about that time to Lord Dorset, which ran thus: "'Twere a pity one of the best of men should be lost for the worst of causes; doe not sacrifice a life everybody values for a religion you yourself despise; make your peace in time, or know that after this 27th of January you have not long to live: take this warning from a friend before repentance is in vain." What, if any, effect this missive had on Dorset's conduct at this juncture it is difficult to say; taken together with his dislike of James and that monarch's rebuffs it may have been cumulative.

* Dorset seems always to have been ready to assist the distressed in this way, and in 1684 we find him going bail in a similar sum for Lord Arundel of Wardour, while he took a leading part in the "escape" of the Princess Anne in 1688.

Among other honours showered on Dorset by the new King we find him selected as one of the godfathers to the son of the Prince and Princess (Anne) of Denmark, His Majesty being the other.

In 1690 William was about to set out for Holland, and we learn that Lord Dorset was making great preparations to attend him on the journey. It proved a disagreeable experience, and might easily have been a fatal one. Luttrell (whose records have the value and take the place often of news sheets) thus notices the circumstance: "His Majestie on the 19th (of January, 1691), being in his yatch, was informed by a fisherman that he was near the shore, whereon he left the yatch attended by the Duke of Ormond, Earl of Devonshire, Earl of Dorsett, Earl of Portland, Earl of Monmouth, Mr. Overkirk, and Mr. Zulesteyn, and went off in a small chalout or two, thinking to land in an hour or two; but finding themselves mistaken, being further from the land then they imagined, and a great fogg arising, so that they had lost sight of the ships, and the flakes of ice being great, they thought it safest to lye still all night; so reacht not the Goree till the 20th in the morning." They are said to have been in a sad plight, after this long exposure, when they did get to land, and Lord Dorset appears to have long suffered from the effects of the experience.

After the death of his first wife, Dorset married, in 1685, Lady Mary Compton, daughter of the Earl of Northampton. She died before 1692, in the March of which year there was a report that the Earl was about to marry a daughter of Lord Allington. Nothing, however, happened; but in the following year (October, 1693) a similar report was current. Still nothing transpired; although in August, 1694, Luttrell states that "The Earl of Dorset is *married* to the late Lord Allington's daughter." However, a subsequent entry is to the effect that the wedding had been put off owing to the illness of the Queen. As a matter of fact such a union never took place at all. Luttrell is on surer ground when he states subsequently (October, 1704) that "The Earl of Dorsett is married to one Mrs. Roch:" the marriage taking place on the 27th of that month.

A few intimate details concerning Lord Dorset are to be gathered from the same assiduous collector of daily news. Thus we learn from his pages that in May, 1702, a marriage had been arranged between the Earl's daughter, Lady Mary Sackville, and the Duke of Beaufort, and that the wedding took place in the following July; that at an earlier date a natural daughter of his had been married to the Earl of Orrery. We hear of the Earl entertaining the Prince of Denmark for stag-hunting at Copt Hall, Essex, in June, 1695; of the King dining with him at

Greenwich* in the previous year; of the Prince and Princess of Denmark and the Duke of Gloucester, on their way to take the waters at Tunbridge Wells, dining with him at Knole in August, 1697; and finally we learn of his being the victim of a highway robbery: "Saturday night (July 22nd, 1699) the Earl of Dorsett was sett upon in his coach between Fulham and Chelsey by 10 persons on horseback, supposed to be disbanded soldiers, who took from him 60 guineas, a gold watch, gold snuffe box, with his sword, &c.; upon which robbery the lords justices have ordered the horse and foot guards to patroul constantly, night and day, in all the roads leading to this city, that suspitious persons may be seized and a general search made in all houses for highwaymen and footpads."

Lord Dorset's principal seat was, of course, the Knole of many and famous memories; but, as we have seen, he also had a country place, Copt Hall in Essex, and in his official capacity as Keeper he had lodgings in Greenwich Palace. When in London he resided much in apartments at Whitehall,† but it is known that he at one time lived in King Street, Westminster, and at another (1681) in Buckingham Street, Strand. That he

* Dorset was always a generous supporter of objects of general welfare as well as of private persons, and he was one of those who subscribed £500 towards the formation of Greenwich Hospital.

† In the Secret Service Expenses this entry appears: "To the Earl of Dorsett, for and in considrac'on of his lodgings, which were taken from him to make room for the new buildings in the Privy Gardens at Whitehall—£300."

was well acquainted, in his earlier days, with the fashionable (and not always respectable) taverns of the city is proved by his exploits at the Cock in Bow Street and elsewhere* ; and it is said that it was at The Rummers in Whitehall that he once came upon Prior as a boy reading Horace, and took him away and had him educated.

In 1697 he resigned the office of Lord Chamberlain, which he had held for eighteen years ; but not without a return, if we are to credit Lord Dartmouth, who states that he received in lieu of it the sum of ten thousand pounds. Mackay, in his memoirs, says that towards the close of his life he became very fat and suffered from his liver, although, adds the writer, " he is still one of the pleasantest companions in the world, when he likes his companion." It is probable that his corpulency indicated a dropsical tendency, certainly his doctors recommended him to take a course of the Bath waters, and it was while doing so that the end came on January 29th, 1706. On the preceding 26th of the month, Luttrell writes that he was then given over. Congreve, who was with him during some of his last days, says that he even then " *slabbered* more wit than others did who were in the best of health."

An example of his form of wit, not without acidity, has been preserved : for when on one

* When Buckingham was taken to the Tower one remembers that Dorset was one of those who accompanied him to the Sun Tavern, in Bishopsgate Street.

occasion Charles II heard the bells ringing, and, asking what it was for, was told it was the anniversary of the birthday of Queen Elizabeth, and thereupon wondered how it happened that her birthday was still kept while those of his father and grandfather were forgotten, Dorset replied: "Because she, being a woman, chose men for her counsellors, and men, when they reign, generally choose women."

Lord Dorset was buried in the family vault at Withyham, Sussex, where his monument may still be seen. He was succeeded in the family honours and estates by his son Lionel, at that time just nineteen years of age, who was created a Duke by George I in 1720, and who equalled his father in the grace of his manners and the dignity of his appearance.*

The character which Macaulay has left of Dorset is an essentially accurate one, and, as confirming what I have already said about him, a portion of it may fitly round off this chapter with a purple patch. "None of the English nobles enjoyed a larger measure of public favour than Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset. He was indeed a remarkable man. In his youth he had been one of the most notorious libertines of the wild time which followed the Restoration. He had been the terror of the City watch, had passed

* Dorset left at least four natural children, all daughters: three who are described in his will as Ann Lee, and Katherine and Mary Walgrave, and another, Mary, whose mother's surname is not known.

many nights in the round house, and had at least once occupied a cell in Newgate. His passion for Betty Morrice and for Nell Gwynn, who called him her Charles the First, had given no small amusement and scandal to the town. Yet in the midst of follies and vices, his courageous spirit, his fine understanding, and his natural goodness of heart, had been conspicuous. Men said that the excesses in which he indulged were common between him and the whole race of gay young cavaliers, but that his sympathy with human suffering, and the generosity with which he made reparation to those whom his freaks had injured, were all his own. . . . . His graceful manners, his brilliant conversation, his soft heart, his open hand, were universally praised."

The historian proceeds to dilate on Dorset's brilliancy, as well as on his generous patronage of the men of letters of his day, and he concludes thus: "The munificent Earl might, if such had been his wish, have been the rival of those of whom he was content to be the benefactor. For the verses which he occasionally composed, unstudied as they are, exhibit the traces of a genius which, assiduously cultivated, would have produced something great. In the small volume of his works may be found songs which have the easy vigour of Suckling, and little satires which sparkle with wit as splendid as that of Butler."

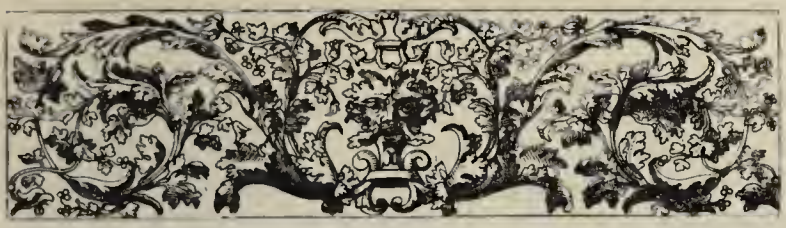
WILLIAM WYCHERLEY.

—

HENRY BROUNCKER.

—

HENRY JERMYN.



CHAPTER X.

LESSER RAKES OF THE RESTORATION.

THE outstanding rakes of this period are those concerning whom I have attempted to say something in the foregoing chapters. There were various reasons for the prominent parts they took in the *vie galante* of the times becoming specially notorious. Buckingham and Rochester and Dorset were great nobles, descended from families which had proved their devotion and loyalty to the Crown in a variety of ways; Sedley was a poet and Etheredge a playwright, whose achievement, limited in bulk as it was, made no inconsiderable mark during their lifetime and forms still a notable contribution to our knowledge of the manners and customs of the later seventeenth century. It is not surprising that men with such material and mental endowments, when they gave their mind to profligacy and excess in all sorts of directions, should have become marked as special objects of attention

both by contemporaries and by later generations. It is the fate of men in high positions to have both their virtues and defects exaggerated; and a Buckingham or a Rochester is liable *monstrari digito*, where a Jermyn or a Brouncker is able to creep along doing much the same things, but relatively safe in a quasi-obscurity.

As a matter of fact, there were a number of men, some titled, some possessed of ability, some both, whose names are known to the student of these days, are familiar to the haunters of what may be called the *coulisses* of history, but who to the general reader are almost non-existent. There can be few to whom the personalities of the rakes already dealt with are not to some extent familiar at least by name. But who remembers Henry Brouncker or Henry Jermyn, Sir Charles Barkley or that Lord Vaughan (and he was a peer, too !) of whom Mr. Gregory once told Pepys that he was " one of the lewdest fellows of the age, worse than Sir Charles Sedley," and who in the intervals of equally unseemly talk was accustomed to threaten the life of Lord Clarendon himself ? *

As it takes all sorts to make a world, so it took all sorts to make that smaller world which congregated at Whitehall and St. James's in the days of Charles II, and which revolved like so many satellite stars around the enthroned planet.

* " He was heard to swear that he would do my Lord Clarendon's business."—Pepys.

There was thus a number of men whose names properly enter into our rake's record, but of some of whom we have so little knowledge that no separate account of them could have been given without it being enclosed in many wrappings—and wrappings are the last thing one wants when eager to see the body. One name which will be found in this *olla podrida* is that of a man of real importance—I refer to William Wycherley—but he was also a rake, if not, perhaps, an outstanding one, and I shall chiefly confine myself to a notice of him in this respect, although his career as an author cannot of course be wholly disassociated from that of his notoriety as a fine gentleman and one of the many favoured by the notorious Duchess of Cleveland.

William Wycherley.

William Wycherley, the son of Daniel Wycherley, a Teller of the Exchequer, a member of the Inner Temple, and, later, Steward to the Marquis of Winchester, was born at Clive near Shrewsbury in or about the year 1640. He passed some years of his early life (he was but fifteen at the time) in Paris, where his youthful and handsome figure was well known among the fashionable and literary celebrities who assembled at the Hotel de Rambouillet. That famous salon, which stood where the Magasins du Louvre now attract a very

different crowd, provided a meeting-place where literary men were received on an equal footing with great nobles, and where Wycherley met not only the famous *précieuses* of the period but such outstanding personalities as Jean Chapelain and Benserade; Corneille and Bossuet; Mademoiselle de Scudéry, of *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie* fame; Madame de Sevigné and Madame Scarron, not yet raised to the dignity of a King's wife. Here he also encountered the bearers of those ancient and historic names with which the history of France is sown. He also spent some time in the country, at Saintonge on the banks of the Charente, where he met Madame de Montansier (née de Rambouillet) who used to call him "the little Huguenot."

Such an experience was equivalent to a liberal education, and Wycherley came back to England if not exactly a scholar in one sense of the word, at least a finished man of the world, whose exquisite manners were well set off by his attractive appearance. On his return he went for a time to Queen's College, Oxford, but never matriculated, and then passed to the Inner Temple in 1659, where he gave himself up to the study of the drama rather than to a study of the law. So handsome a man, with his French experiences full on him, was not likely to be long in London before attracting the notice of a Court where good looks and wit were the chief recommendations;

and before long he appeared at Whitehall, dazzling many a fair one by his presence and amusing Majesty itself by his wit and good humour.

In 1672 he wrote his *Love in a Wood*, which was performed with great applause. It was just one of those clever, witty, indecent productions which appealed to the Court of Charles II, and to a large number of less exalted persons at that period, and it was responsible for a curious episode in the life of its writer. In it a song is introduced sung by Lady Flippant (her part was sustained, by the way, by Mrs. Knipp, Pepys's friend), of which the last verse runs thus :—

"When Parents are Slaves,
Their Brats cannot be any other;
Great Wits, and Great Braves,
Have always a Punk to their Mother."

The Duchess of Cleveland had seen the play, when, one day driving in Pall Mall, her coach happened to pass that of the handsome young dramatist. To his amazement he saw her Grace's head thrust out and heard her exclaim : "You, Wycherley, are the son of a whore." For a moment he was thunderstruck, but immediately remembering his song, he rightly assumed that under guise of a low apostrophe the Duchess indicated admiration for his wit and person ; and ordering his carriage to follow hers into the Park he soon found that his surmise was correct, and that the expression was a characteristic

overture. The Duchess, who liked variety, shared her favours with Wycherley and the King. Buckingham, who soon found out all about the *liaison*, at first threatened to open Charles's eyes to the fact, but happening to meet the playwright soon after, he was so delighted with his wit and good manners that from being a potential enemy he became a fast friend.

It was some years after this (1678)* that Wycherley had a serious illness and lay at his lodgings in Bow Street on the west side, "over against the Cock." Charles, hearing of this, did him the unusual honour of going to see him. He found him so weak that he commanded him, as soon as he should be well enough to undertake the journey, to go to Montpelier, the air of which he thought likely to restore him. The King ordered £500 to be paid him for his expenses; and accordingly shortly after Wycherley set out for the South of France, whence, after spending the winter there, he returned completely cured. Wycherley was just the sort of man on whom Charles loved to exercise his generosity; and in addition to this then large sum given him for the purposes of recuperating his health, it is said, on the authority of Pope, who knew the dramatist well, that the King not infrequently made him money presents, as well as appointed him one of

* It is curious that Dryden, writing to Etheredge in 1687, should speak of Wycherley being ill with apoplexy.

his equerries.† It also seems that Wycherley at one time held a commission in the army; and to this Dennis probably refers when giving the playwright a military title in the following reminiscence: "I remember," he says, "about this time, I happened to be one night at the Fountain Tavern in the Strand with the late Dr. Duke, David Loggan the painter, and Mr. Wilson . . . . . and that after supper we drank Mr. Wycherley's health by the name of Captain Wycherley."

Wycherley was now launched on the life which was then regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of terrestrial happiness. He was kindly regarded by his sovereign; he was *au mieux* with that sovereign's insatiable mistress; and he was the friend and boon companion of that sovereign's favourite. His dramatic gifts, however we may regard them now, were then just such as were likely to appeal to the profligate Court; in them, wit and indecency went hand in hand; and *The Gentleman Dancing Master* (1673), which closely followed *Love in a Wood* (the published version of which was preceded by a fulsome dedication to the Duchess of Cleveland); *The Country Wife* (1675), produced two years later; and *The Plain Dealer*, which appeared in 1677, more than confirmed their author's reputation and enlarged the circle of his acquainance.

† Dennis says this post was held by Wycherley to the Duke of Buckingham when the latter was Master of the Horse.

It is a curious fact that as one of his plays was responsible for providing him with a titled mistress, another was the means of his gaining a titled wife. It happened in this wise. Being at Tunbridge Wells on one occasion in company with a friend, Mr. Fairbeard of Gray's Inn, he went into a book-shop and was gratified by hearing a charming female customer asking for *The Plain Dealer*. Mr. Fairbeard, also overhearing the remark, immediately addressed the lady : " Madam,' he said, " since you ask for ' The Plain Dealer ' here he is," with which he pushed Wycherley towards her. " Yes," exclaimed Wycherley, " this lady can bear plain dealing, for she appears to be so accomplished that what would be a compliment to others spoken to her would be plain dealing." " No, truly, Sir," replied the fair *incognita*, " I am not without my faults any more than the rest of my sex ; but, notwithstanding, I love plain dealing, and am never more fond of it than when it tells me of them." " Then," interposed Mr. Fairbeard, " you and the ' Plain Dealer ' seem by heaven designed for each other." And so forth, and so on, quite in the congeeing manner of one of Wycherley's own plays.*

Briefly, Wycherley accompanied the lady to her lodgings, discovered that she was the widow

* " M. Wycherley fut long-temps l'amant declaré de la maitresse la plus illustrée de Charles second. Cet homme, qui passait sa vie dans la plus grande monde, en connoissait parfaitement les vices et les ridicules, et les peignait du pinceau la plus ferme et des couleurs les plus vraies."—Voltaire : *Lettres sur les Anglais*.

of the Earl of Drogheda, paid her much acceptable attention at Tunbridge Wells, and continued it in Hatton Garden, where she lived, and after a little while married her. The lady had lost her first husband in the June of 1679, after a wedded life of ten years, and possessed a jointure of £800 a year. She was the daughter of John, Lord Robarts, whose second wife, by encouraging the advances of James, Duke of York, gave that not unnaturally jealous nobleman an excuse for removing her from the Court of Charles, as Grammont tells us.

This marriage was the most unfortunate event in Wycherley's life. Lady Drogheda proved a jealous wife, and, what was even worse, the marriage for some reason greatly annoyed the King. As a matter of fact, just before Wycherley met the lady he had been marked out for the office of Governor to the Duke of Richmond (Charles's son), a post worth £1,500 a year—and really worth it, inasmuch as it was to be paid by Government and not by Charles. Wycherley was, however, so assiduous in his wooing that for a time he neglected the Court, where his friends who had helped to arrange the appointment (it was probably Buckingham, who may himself have had designs on Lady Drogheda) lost all interest in him. Be the reason what it may, the fact is established that Wycherley lost the chance.

But this was not the full extent of his misfortunes. Lady Drogheda died, and instead of benefiting by anything she may have been able to leave him (if, which is improbable, there was anything) he found his affairs in so bad and complicated a state that he was forced into the Fleet Prison, where he languished for no fewer than seven years. Indeed, he might have remained in durance for the rest of his life had not a friend, Colonel Brett,* bethought himself of making some effort on his behalf. To this end he persuaded one of the theatres to perform *The Plain Dealer*, and also persuaded the King (James II) to be present. James was highly pleased with the play, and asked who the author was. Learning it was Wycherley, he remarked that it was many years since he had seen the dramatist at Court, and asked what had become of him. Being told his unfortunate history, James ordered his debts to be paid. But like so many people in similar straits, Wycherley feared to reveal the full amount of his indebtedness, and only returned his debts at £500. The result was that he was not released, and only after six months of further captivity did he find himself a free man, the amount of some three or four hundred pounds outstanding being at last paid by his father.†

* He may possibly have been the Brett who married Lady Macclesfield.

† Such is substantially the account given by Dennis to Spence; but in the *Letters* of the former there are certain variations. James is said to have settled £200 a year on him, in addition.

It is probable that Wycherley returned to his old lodgings in Bow Street after his Fleet experiences, and it was either here or at one of his favourite taverns—the Cock, close to his rooms, or the Half Moon in Aldersgate Street, or the Bear by London Bridge on the Southwark side*—that Pope first met him. The poet was then only in his seventeenth year (1705), but he became very intimate with Wycherley, and saw much of him during the remaining ten years of the dramatist's life. It is to Pope that we owe various interesting, but not always accurate, *data* concerning Wycherley's latter years; for Pope talked much of his friend to Spence, and Spence has recorded much that might otherwise have been lost. Thus we learn that his good looks were a source of satisfaction to him, and that the engraving which Smith did of him in 1703, on which the motto, *quantum mutatus ab illo*, was ordered by Wycherley himself to be placed, was an excellent likeness. He had the "nobleman" look, says Pope—"that look which noblemen should have rather than what they generally have now. The Duke of Buckingham possessed it, and Wycherley equally with the Duke."

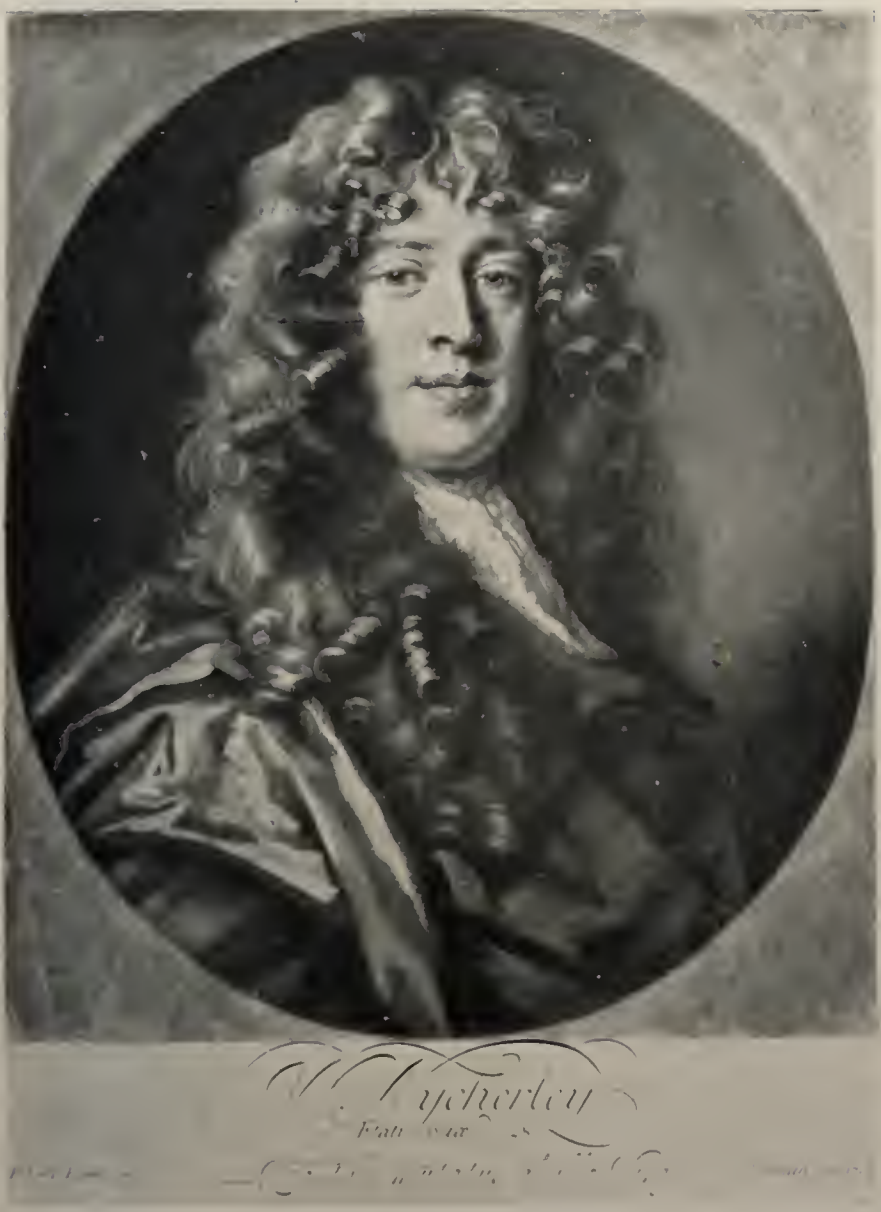
It is always interesting to know intimate details of those who have made a figure in life; and many who haven't but who indulge in the same

* It is mentioned several times by Pepys, and it was here that the Duke of Richmond met Miss Stewart when he eloped with her.

habit will be glad to know that the playwright was accustomed to read in bed. "Wycherley used to read himself asleep o' nights," says Pope, "either in Montaigne, Rochefoucauld, Seneca, or Gratian, for these were his four favourite authors." Some of his reading, however, was productive of curious results. Let Pope explain: "He would read one or other of them in the evening, and the next morning perhaps write a copy of verses on some subject similar to what he had been reading, and have several of their thoughts, only expressed in a different turn; and that without knowing that he was obliged to them for any one thought in the whole poem. I have experienced this in him several times (for I visited him for a whole winter almost every evening and morning), and look upon it as one of the strangest phenomenons that ever I observed in the human mind."

Pope not only visited him but gave him no little assistance in his poetical exercises; indeed, several of his own were, he tells us, inserted among those of Wycherley.* He corrected many of his lines, as did Dennis, and neither always received much thanks for his pains. It appears that in consequence of the illness to which I have before referred, Wycherley's memory was so

* These later effusions are not to be confounded with Wycherley's earlier efforts written in his hot youth, which for indecency are worse than Rochester's acknowledged poems, and almost as bad as those which have been wrongly attributed to him.



WILLIAM WYCHERLEY.

curiously affected that he was continually repeating himself, not only in work produced after the lapse of many years, but in the course of a single set of verses; so that he was perpetually, as it were, his own plagiarist.

Pope seems to have got on very well with him. The fact that they were both Roman Catholics was a bond between them, although one can hardly imagine any form of religious belief to have had an attraction for so loose a liver as Wycherley. But one must remember that he was growing old, and as we have seen in the case of other rakes, a man is never so ardent a *dévot* as when he has put off being so till late in life. Pope remarks that: "we were pretty well together to the last; only his memory was so totally bad that he did not remember a kindness done to him, even from minute to minute. He was peevish, too, latterly; so that sometimes we were out a little, and sometimes in. He never did any unjust thing to me in his whole life*; and I went to see him on his death-bed."

Wycherley's latter days, no doubt soothed as they were by the presence and devotion of one with whom he had various things in common, were troubled by other matters. He possessed an estate, which I imagine came to him from his father. But this estate was entailed in favour

* Notwithstanding this, Pope rather obviously refers to his old friend in some stinging lines in his *Essay on Criticism*; but that was quite in the Popeian manner.

of a nephew, although Wycherley had the power of settling his widow's jointure. The nephew would not consent to the sale of any portion of the estate, although Wycherley greatly desired to do this in order to pay off his debts which then amounted to about a thousand pounds. Irritated beyond measure by the attitude of his nephew, he resolved to marry, in order to settle a jointure large enough to cover the payment of his debts; and also, as Pope says he used to put it, "to plague his damned nephew." There seems a discrepancy in the description of the lady he did marry only ten days before his death. Pope told Spence she "was a cheat; a cast mistress of the person who recommended her to Wycherley, and was supplied by him with money for her trousseau." On the other hand, in a footnote to the passage in Spence's *Anecdotes* it is stated that she was a certain Elizabeth Jackson, one of the daughters and coheiresses of Mr. Joseph Jackson, of Hertingfordbury, and possessed a fortune of £1,000.

Wycherley made his will on December 31st, 1715, and only executed it two hours before he died, on that very day. By it he left a jointure of £400 a year to his "dear and well-beloved wife, Elizabeth Wycherley," and he appointed a relation of his, Thomas Shrimpton, his executor. Three months later the said Shrimpton married the widow. Whereupon the nephew filed a bill in Chancery against the couple, and alleged that

Elizabeth had been married to Shrimpton before she went through the ceremony with Wycherley, who, he contended, had been imposed upon. However, they won the case, and therefore the terms of Wycherley's will took effect. There are some grounds for supposing that there was a modicum of truth in both statements concerning the lady's previous life. It seems pretty certain that she was a coheiress, that Shrimpton was the friend who had recommended her as a suitable foil to the nephew's recalcitrance, and that she had been Shrimpton's mistress before becoming Wycherley's wife. It is an unpleasant episode, but it might in earlier days have afforded the dramatist an appropriate *motif* for another play, in which he would have had scope for much characteristic and witty dialogue and for some of those *risqué* situations which abound in the dramatic literature of the period.

Wycherley died in Bow Street, and was buried in the vaults of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, where he lies in the company of so many who made the days of the Restoration decorative, if not always edifying. There repose Samuel Butler and Grinling Gibbons; Kynaston, the famous impersonator of female characters, and Mrs. Centlivre, the female playwright; and Sir Peter Lely, to whose brush we owe the perpetuation of those charms which played such havoc with the susceptible heart of Old Rowley and his galaxy

of rakes; those "dear, dead women," with their wiles and their caresses, their pouting lips and their heavy sensuous eyes. . . . .

Henry Brouncker.

The name of Brouncker, or Brounker as it is frequently spelt, is a familiar one to students of the period, for it was borne by that quite notable person, William, Viscount Brouncker, famous as having been the first President of the Royal Society as well as for holding a variety of other posts of honour, especially about the Court, where he was Chancellor to Catherine of Braganza, as well as the Keeper of her Great Seal—posts no longer in existence. The pages of Pepys and Evelyn swarm with references to this scientific nobleman, who made mathematics a serious study, and who was "profound," as Burnet says, in this science. He had little in common with his lesser known (but more notorious where he *was* known) brother, who according to Evelyn was not only "hard and covetous" but also vicious, and possessed a "worldly craft and skill in gaming."

Henry Brouncker, the brother in question, was certainly vicious, indeed he was as confirmed a libertine as even the Court of Charles II had to show—which is saying something. Clarendon has recorded his profligacy; Grammont has given

more precise evidences of it ; Pepys has preserved some curious instances of his character, although our old friend was not above consorting with him when occasion served ; while Burnet confines himself to a reference to one of his public acts which appears to have been as pusillanimous as his private life (if so unblushing a libertine ever cared to keep his misdeeds private) was shameless.

Those who believe in heredity will find some confirmation of their theory in the fact that Brouncker's mother was that Winifred Leigh, married to Sir William Brouncker, Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Charles I and a Vice-Chamberlain to Charles II, whose name is famous in contemporary records for her inordinate love of gambling and the extent to which she carried her passion. It would seem, if we are so to understand the reference in a contemporary epigram on the lady and her husband, that her predilection for the devil's playthings must have played havoc with her husband's estate :—

> " Here's a health to my Lady Brounker,
> And the best card in her hand :
> And a health to my lord her husband,
> With ne'er a foot of land."

What in the lady caused her to become the " extraordinary great gamester " of Aubrey's prose, and the heroine of Mr. Arundel's verse, was transformed in her younger son into a passion

of another sort. As Browning somewhere says, "Women were the game for him;" and there is no doubt that even among many who gave themselves to the amorous chase, Henry Brouncker was notable. I can hardly do better, in illustrating this, than quote what Grammont has said regarding him:—

"Of all men at Court Brouncker had the least esteem for the fair sex, and the least regard to their reputation. He was not young, and his person was disagreeable; however, with a great deal of wit he had a violent passion for women. He did himself justice respecting his own merit, and being persuaded he could only succeed with females who were desirous of having his money, he carried on open war with all the rest. He had a little country house four or five miles from London, always well stocked with girls, but in other respects he was a very good sort of man." The tolerant Frenchman did not find it difficult to believe in Brouncker's other excellencies, nor, we may be sure, was he likely to regard the passion he mentions with specially inimical feelings. The trouble is that Brouncker's amorous propensities were by no means the extent of his shortcomings; and although he was apparently affable and complacent, he has not escaped the accusation of being both a rogue and a coward. One thing he did really well—a rather curious adjunct to such a character as his—he was a fine chess

player ; so fine indeed that those who have most angrily animadverted against his failings have been obliged to confess his excellence in the game—its devotees would prefer me to use the word science, I am sure.

Pepys, who knew him, makes no bones about calling him "a pestilential rogue and atheist, and one that would have sold his King and country for sixpence almost, so corrupt and wicked was he, by all men's report." When the Diarist wrote this Brouncker had been dismissed from his position as Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the Duke of York for certain reflections he had made on Lord Clarendon, the Duke's father-in-law. But what he really deserved dismissal for was something very different, and it was rankling under that, in his capacity as Secretary to the Navy, that caused Pepys to utter his diatribe.

The circumstance to which I refer is a little obscure, but there seems no doubt that Brouncker's part in the transaction was at once cowardly and unpatriotic. In his capacity as Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the Duke of York he had accompanied that prince in the naval expedition against the Dutch in 1665. A particularly hot engagement took place between the two fleets, and as night came on the Dutch, who had had the worst of it, withdrew. The question arose as to the advantage or otherwise of pursuing them. It is curious that there should have been any

difference of opinion on the matter, as prompt action would undoubtedly have enabled the English to obtain a decisive victory. However, a Council was held, at which some of the Duke's friends were anxious for him to rest content with what laurels he had already gained, and not to risk anything by prosecuting the fight further. James by no means agreed with this, and before retiring to rest he gave orders for all sail to be set with a view to following the enemy. Another council was then held to concert measures for dealing with the Dutch when they should be overtaken. At that council Sir William Penn, who was second in command, happened to remark "that they must prepare for hotter work in the next engagement." This made an impression, as the Earl of Montague, who was then a volunteer with the Fleet, told Burnet. It appears, too, that the Duchess of York had given strict injunctions to all the Duke's people to hinder his exposing himself too far. James had given orders that he was to be awakened directly the Dutch Fleet was again sighted. In the meanwhile Brouncker went to Penn and told him that the Duke's orders were that all sail should be slackened. The Vice-Admiral was astonished at the command, but instead of awakening James to find out if it was really correct did as he was bidden. When James awoke he was amazed to find all the Fleet at a standstill, and every chance of overtaking

the Dutch gone. He sent for Penn, who told him of the message he had received through Brouncker. No one has ever questioned James's courage, and there seems little doubt on all the evidence that Brouncker had invented the order so that no further risks might be run. The general belief put it on Brouncker's cowardice, but although he was dismissed nothing worse happened to him, and Burnet opines that it was said the Duke dared do no more in the way of punishing the man who had robbed him of almost certain victory, "because he was so much in the King's favour, and in the Mistress's." Thus the canker which spread itself through the whole of the administration of Charles II is here shewn to have been responsible in shielding a "pimp" from the punishment he deserved. For that Brouncker was a pimp is a fact. The post of Gentleman of the Bedchamber either to the King or his brother connotes so much, and "Brouncker, Love's Squire," as Andrew Marvell terms him, comes down to us notorious as a pander to the pleasures of his sovereigns, and as having the one redeeming quality of being an accomplished chess player!

If we may credit Clarendon, James was ignorant of the reputation of the man who was so intimately about his person, although he must have realised that many of his *menus plaisirs* were due to that man's good (or bad) offices. In his *Continuation* of his *Life*, Clarendon, who certainly had

no cause to love Brouncker, thus refers to the matter: "Nor did the Duke come to hear of it" (*i.e.*, Brouncker's part in the Dutch fight) "till some years after, when Brouncker's ill course of life and his abominable nature had rendered him so odious that it was taken notice of in Parliament, and upon examination found to be true, as is here related; upon which he was expelled the House of Commons, whereof he was a member, as an infamous person, though his friend Coventry adhered to him, and used many indirect acts to have protected him, and afterwards procured him to have more countenance from the King than most men thought he deserved; being a person throughout his whole life never notorious for anything but the highest degree of impudence, and stooping to the most infamous offices, and playing very well at chess, which preferred him more than the most virtuous qualities could have done."

Pepys, noticing the dismissal of Brouncker,* says that "Everybody is glad of it; for he was a pestilent rogue," and elsewhere in the *Diary* we have evidences of it. The *liaison* of the Duke of York with Lady Denham, who died so mysteriously of poison, was due to his intervention. "Mr. Brouncker, it seems, was the pimp to bring

* Pepys says that the dismissal was caused by "some bold words Brounker was heard by Colonel Werden to say in the garden the day the Chancellor was with the King—that he believed the King would be hectored out of everything." It was probably the cumulative effect of various offences that at last opened the eyes of Charles and his brother.

it about," says the Diarist, who acknowledges that the man "was one of the shrewdest fellows for parts in England, and a dangerous man." It is rather amusing to find, after using such expressions, that Pepys records going on April 17th, 1668, to the King's House, to see *The Surprisal*, in company with—of all persons—Harry Brouncker!

Notwithstanding conduct sufficient in ordinary times to have blasted the career of most men, Brouncker possessed such impudence and, there is little doubt, influence, that we find him towards the close of the year 1668 again appearing at Whitehall, and not only that but "secure that he shall be well received." Nor was this all, for in the spring of the following year he spoke so insolently at the palace to Sir John Morton,* who had been one of those responsible for his dismissal from Parliament, that he was summoned by one of the Judges to give security for his good behaviour.

The fact is that Brouncker had in the past been the intermediary in so many scandalous incidents in the lives of both Charles and the Duke of York, knew so many secrets concerning their amorous adventures, and indeed had so wormed

† The matter went further, according to a news-letter of March 9th, 1669, where it is stated that Mr. Henry Brouncker and Sir John Morton having by accident met in the street, drew upon each other on account of some words used by the former some days before, and that after some passes Mr. Brouncker came off with a wound in his side.

himself into their favour and confidence by his readiness to act as a sort of Court pander, that his position was too strong a one to be easily assailed by his enemies. Charles might have been unable to get him back into the House of Commons; James might have been, perforce, obliged to dismiss him for a time from his service; but neither dared do much more, and Brouncker the pimp was in a stronger position when attacked than the great Clarendon. It was largely a question of being a friend or an enemy of the reigning mistress, and the Chancellor fell because Castlemaine disliked him, while Brouncker weathered the storm because he had found favour with the titled harlot.

An incident in Brouncker's career is recorded by Grammont with all that lengthy particularity which makes his memoirs often so amusing, still oftener such tiresome reading. It will be remembered that on one occasion Lord Rochester set up his booth as a German doctor in Tower Street. The fame of the new empiric having reached Whitehall, Miss Price was very anxious to see the novelty for herself, and easily persuaded another Maid of Honour, Miss Jennings, to disguise herself and accompany her to the east end of the town for this purpose. Off they started from Whitehall in a hackney coach, disguised as orange girls, determining on their way to enter one of the theatres and sell oranges in the sight

of the Court itself. There they encountered Killigrew, who, becoming too friendly, was repulsed by one of them, whereupon he remarked: "Ha! ha! here's a rarity indeed! a young w—— who the better to sell her goods, sets up for virtue and pretends innocence." Rather frightened at this incident the two daring young ladies determined to leave the play-house and proceed to their other destination. They took another hackney-coach and were close to Rochester's booth when they encountered Brouncker, who had been dining with a merchant in the city and was just leaving the house. "They ordered their coach to stop," says Grammont, "as ill-luck would have it, just opposite to him: two orange-girls in a hackney coach, one of whom appeared to have a very pretty face, immediately drew his attention; besides, he had a natural curiosity for such objects." Miss Price became very alarmed at being examined closely "by the most dangerous enemy they could encounter," and turning her head away from him told the coachman to drive on. Brouncker, however, followed them on foot, and when a little further on they alighted he again came up with them, imagining that one (Miss Jennings) was a young courtesan upon the look-out, and that the other (Miss Price) was the "mother-abbess," and he resolved to purchase the former "in order to place her in his seraglio."

During the conversation that ensued, finding that his offers of money were of no avail, he took a more particular look at the girls, and then discovered whom they were. But he expressed no surprise, and after some talk, during which he remarked to Miss Price "that she was a great fool to refuse his offers, and that her girl would not, perhaps, get so much in a year as she might with him in a day; that the times were greatly changed, since the Queen's and the Duchess's Maids of Honour forestalled the market, and were to be had cheaper than the town ladies;" he left them, fully persuaded that they were bound on an adventure of a licentious character; and rather pleased than otherwise that Miss Jennings, who was then thought to be going to marry Harry Jermyn, should go to that gentleman rather in the character of a street-walker than as the immaculate young lady he supposed her to be. The two heedless girls were lucky enough, after some further incidents, to reach Whitehall again in safety; and as Miss Jennings did not after all marry Jermyn, nor had been guilty, as Brouncker's disordered mind imagined her to have been, of anything worse than indiscretion, the pimp's anticipated triumph did not materialise.

After Brouncker's encounter with Sir John Morton his distasteful figure swims out of our ken. He possessed a house at Richmond, in the Old Deer Park, and there he probably lived in retire-

ment; and inasmuch as Evelyn records dining with him on August 27th, 1678, one may hope that he had by that time become *rangé*, and had retired from his activities both as a pander to royalty and a profligate on his own account. The place he owned had once been a monastery of Carthusians (Evelyn records that one of their solitary cells with a cross in it still remained in his day), so that if Brouncker's licentious courses did still continue in this once holy environment, it would form a companion picture to the orgies of the Hell-Fire Club of the following century amid the once hallowed precincts of Medmenham Abbey.

That Brouncker still continued to hold the office of Cofferer to the King at this time and later is proved also by an entry in Evelyn's Diary, which states (1680) that Sir Stephen Fox had been granted the reversion of the post "after Harry Brouncker." But Sir Stephen had to wait another seven years before this reversion fell in, for it was not till January 4th, 1688,* that Brouncker died at his monastic dwelling. He was buried in Richmond Church, where may be seen a mural monument to him, near the altar.

He bequeathed his Richmond property to Sir Charles Littleton; his wife, Rebecca Rodway (whom he had married in 1661 and with whom he had a great estate) widow of Thomas Jermyn,

* New Style.

having apparently predeceased him, and Evelyn on March 24th, 1688, records paying the new owner a visit there. "I went with Sir Charles Littleton to Sheene (Richmond), an house and estate given him by Lord Brouncker; one who was ever noted for a hard, covetous, vicious man; but for his worldly craft and skill in gaming few exceeded him. Coming to die, he bequeath'd all his land, house, furniture, &c. to Sir Charles, to whom he had no manner of relation, but an ancient friendship contracted at the famous siege of Colchester, 40 years before."

So much had Brouncker, who on the death of his elder brother had succeeded to the title, been forgotten that the usually observant Luttrell does not mention his death, although he records that of another not dissimilar character, Henry Progers, also a pander to Charles II's pleasures, dignified by a Knighthood and the office of Serjeant-porter to the King, in the same month as that in which Henry Brouncker closed his rather hectic and dishonourable career.*

Henry Jermyn.

There is another man some notice of whom cannot be omitted from any account of the rakes

* That, although he was vicious, he possessed both ability and courage, is to some extent proved by the fact that he was admitted a Doctor of Medicine at Oxford in 1646 (he had matriculated at Wadham in 1642); and demeaned himself creditably at the siege of Colchester in 1648. He was M.P. for Romney from 1665 to 1668, when he was expelled for refusing to attend the House when summoned.

of the Restoration, although his position at Court was in one sense a subsidiary one; certainly not as outstanding as were those of the men already dealt with. This was Henry Jermyn, later to become Lord Dover. Few names bulk more largely in the scandalous annals of the period than that of Henry Jermyn, few seem superficially to connote so feeble and ineffective (except, curiously enough, in love or what passed then for the term) a character.

He was born in 1636, the second son of Thomas Jermyn of Rushbrooke, in Suffolk, and might have passed through life unknown but at least respectable, had not his uncle, Henry Jermyn, Earl of St. Albans, to whom we owe the development of St. James's Square, and incidentally the foundation of the West End as a residential quarter, introduced him to Court, and thus placed him in a position to which the bent of his mind, if not the impressiveness of his appearance, peculiarly fitted him. Lord St. Albans practically adopted the young man, and supplied him liberally with the money necessary for making a figure at Whitehall.

Harry Jermyn had indeed become something of a personage at an earlier period, for it was at the Court of the Princess of Orange that he first distinguished himself in gallantry, having accompanied the Duke of York to Holland in 1656. That he had a way with him with the ladies is

undeniable, and yet his person was anything but likely, one would have thought, to have inspired admiration or love. He was brave; he was a gentleman; but, as Grammont points out, he had neither brilliant actions nor distinguished rank to set him off. His figure was unprepossessing: "He was little; his head was large and his legs small; his features were not disagreeable, but he was affected in his carriage and behaviour. All his wit consisted in expressions learnt by rote, which he occasionally employed either in raillery or in love. This was the whole foundation of the merit of a man so formidable in amours." *

The reputation he gained in Holland, where the Princess of Orange, Charles II's sister, is supposed to have regarded him at least not indifferently,† to put it mildly, followed him to England; and in spite of his person and his affectations he speedily became one of the outstanding lady-killers of Whitehall. He acquired a sort of name for being invincible, and the fact that it was supposed that no woman could resist him made many women unwilling to attempt the unequal contest. It is easy to see that Grammont with all his *bonhomie* and easy-going philosophy could not away with the large-headed

* Grammont's *Memoirs*.

† Pepys says that there was a report current that they had been actually married, "which is worse," moans the diarist, "than the Duke of York's marrying the Chancellor's daughter, which is now publicly owned." There was nothing in it, however.

dwarf who, like Wilkes at a later date, was irresistible in spite of his personal disadvantages. There was a good and sufficient reason for this enmity in the fact that Jermyn had cast longing eyes on *La Belle Hamilton,* who proved the exception to the rule by refusing to succumb to his blandishments, and who was later to become the wife of Grammont himself.

Jermyn's affair with Mrs. Hyde (she was a daughter of Arthur, Lord Capel, the noted royalist, and was married to Henry Hyde who afterwards became second Earl of Clarendon), was an instance of his influence on the passions of many women. She was, we are told, prejudiced by a blind prepossession in his favour, and although but recently married and holding a high position, for she had by her alliance with Hyde become sister-in-law of the Duchess of York, and was herself admired universally for her wit and charm, yet she thought nothing of all these advantages against the reputation of having an intrigue with the *vainqueur du monde*—the world of women *bien entendu.* Grammont says she was so infatuated that she determined to throw herself into his arms. "Jermyn," adds the same authority, "accepted her at first; but being soon puzzled what to do with her, he thought it best to sacrifice her to Lady Castlemaine."

In the meanwhile he had gained the good graces of the notorious Lady Shrewsbury who,

on one occasion at Spring Gardens, permitted herself to be so monopolised by his attentions that the anger of Mr. Thomas Howard, a recognised lover of the lady, was aroused to such a pitch that he challenged the interloper to a duel The encounter, which took place in St. James's Fields in August, 1662,* very nearly proved fatal to Jermyn, who was carried from the field with three severe wounds and as near death's door as possible, his second, one Giles Rawlings, being killed outright.

We get a glimpse into another of Jermyn's love affairs in the pages of Pepys, who tells us that "a daughter of the Duke of Lennox's was, by force, going to be married the other day, at Somerset House, to Harry Jermyn; but she got away and run to the King, and he says he will protect her. . . . . such mad doings there are every day among them," exclaims the Diarist. There was no end, indeed, to the intrigues of this really remarkable person, or to the reports concerning his matrimonial projects.

It would have been strange if the chief Messalina of the age had escaped so persistent a profligate, or rather perhaps if she had allowed him to escape her clutches, and to the list of the many favoured lovers of Lady Castlemaine was added that of Henry Jermyn. But it is like playing with fire

* Jermyn was at a later date only prevented from fighting a duel with Lord Mulgrave through the personal intervention of the King.

SAMUEL PEPYS.

to have an intrigue with a king's mistress, even when that king is so easy-going a one as Charles almost habitually showed himself to be. At first the King laughed at the presumption of the fellow, but he soon had reason to regard the matter seriously* ; and as a result a certain arrangement was made between him and his mistress (Grammont intervening, as they say in legal circles) by which the latter agreed to have nothing more to do with Jermyn and also to acquiesce in his banishment for a time from the Court. As a matter of fact Lord St. Albans had himself observed the King's growing anger, and had persuaded his amorous nephew to absent himself from Whitehall at the very time when the royal orders were about to be issued for his doing so. Jermyn retired to the country (in December, 1662), and although Charles, ever ready to be complacent, indicated at the end of a fortnight that he had his permission to return to Whitehall, he remained six months in his solitude, "setting up," says Grammont, "for a little philosopher under the eyes of the sportsmen in the neighbourhood, who regarded him as an extraordinary instance of the caprice of fortune."

* "She" (Lady Castlemaine) "is fallen in love with young Jermin, who hath of late been with her oftener than the King, and is now going to marry my Lady Falmouth; the King is mad at her entertaining Jermin and she is mad at Jermin's going to marry from her: so they are all mad; and thus the Kingdom is governed!" (Pepys). Lady Falmouth, as a matter of fact, married Charles Buckhurst, Earl of Dorset, as we have seen.

Half a year having elapsed, Henry Jermyn returned to the Court unabashed, and as *intriguant* as ever. One of the ladies on whom he now cast longing eyes was that Miss Jennings whose famous adventure with Miss Price has already been narrated. It was six of one and half a dozen of the other, for the lady had heard so much of Jermyn's prowess that she took no pains to conceal her desire to make his acquaintance. "Jermyn," says Grammont, "appeared at the right time to satisfy her curiosity by his presence; and though his brilliancy appeared a little tarnished by his residence in the country; though his head was larger and his legs more slender than usual, yet the giddy girl thought she had never seen any man so perfect; and yielding to her destiny she fell in love with him a thousand times more unaccountably than all the others had done before her. . . . . Jermyn was not in the least surprised at this conquest, though not a little proud of it, for his heart had very soon as great a share in it as his vanity."

The tall and handsome Jack Talbot, then madly in love with Miss Jennings (although he subsequently married Miss Boynton) was furious at this change of front on the lady's part; but Jermyn only the more enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the inclinations of one of the prettiest and most extraordinary young ladies at the Court so openly declared in his favour; while many,

from very different reasons, "complimented Miss Jennings upon having reduced to this situation the terror of husbands and the plague of lovers." However, the marriage which it was confidently expected would result from this double infatuation never came off; and Miss Jennings became the wife of George Hamilton; Jermyn after all his courtly conquests marrying "a silly country girl," according to Grammont a Miss Gibbs the daughter of a Cambridgeshire gentleman. So indeed we are informed by a note by Sir Walter Scott on this passage. But this is incorrect. The lady he married was Jane, daughter of Sir Edward Poley, Knight, of Badley in Suffolk*; and one fears that Miss Gibbs was merely one of his many conquests.

We have seen Henry Jermyn under one aspect—that of a pursuer of fair ladies and as the pursued by the fair. But there were other facets to his character which should be noted.† His courage was incontestable, and when an expedition was about to be fitted out against Guinea under the command of Prince Rupert, he was one of the first to volunteer for service with the Fleet. He had been a captain in the 'Duke of Richmond's'

* I see that in the *Dictionary of National Biography* she is called "Judith Pooley," "a lady of singular good character," probably of Boxted, Suffolk.

† We find him wagering five hundred guineas with Grammont that he would ride twenty miles in one hour upon the same horse on the high road, and winning the bet, although at the expense of a violent fever produced by the exertion.

Regiment of Horse in 1666; from 1686 to 1688 he commanded the 4th Troop of Horse Guards; and he subsequently became a Lieutenant-General, as well as having a troop of the Irish Horse Guards in 1689. His Court appointments included those of Master of the Horse to the Duke of York, in which capacity he was allowed to ride in Charles II's Coronation procession, to the disgust of Clarendon; as well as Gentleman of the Bed-Chamber to the Duke* when he had become King. On 13th May, 1685, he had been created Baron Dover by James II, and four years later he was raised to the dignity of an Earl. In 1687 he was Lord Chamberlain for a short time; and two years later he was appointed Joint Vice Treasurer of Ireland, during which time he was sent as Envoy Extraordinary to Paris. In 1703 he succeeded his brother as third Baron Jermyn of St. Edmundsbury.

It will thus be seen that although in the pages of Grammont Henry Jermyn comes before us principally in the character of a rake, he was after all something more; and the man who could, even in those days, have been selected to fill so many and such various posts (he was *inter alia* High Steward of Hull and of Cambridge, of which county he was also Lord Lieutenant from 1686 to 1688), must have had something more in him

* Among the Duke's pensioners Jermyn appears to have received £500, and Etheredge £100 a year. *Eliot-Hodgkin MSS.*

than the qualities necessary for a squire of dames in the most extended sense of the term.

He was a devoted adherent of James II, perhaps his most attractive attribute, and was present at the Battle of the Boyne. When the Stuart cause was hopelessly lost he seems to have made his peace with William, who shewed himself not unfriendly, an attitude that enabled Jermyn to return from the Continent, whither he had been practically banished. Among the MSS. at Chequers is a list of those who had taken up arms against William III, and who had been summoned to answer the charges brought against them in this connection. Among the names appears that of Henry Jermyn, Lord Dover.

Jermyn's latter years were spent in comparative retirement at Cheveley, in Cambridgeshire, although he had a house in Albemarle Buildings, near St. James's Park, and here on April 6th, 1708, he died in his seventy-third year, without issue. For some reason which I confess not to have been able to fathom, his body was conveyed to Bruges and there buried in the Carmelite monastery. St. Evremond, who on one occasion visited Jermyn at Cheveley, tells how "he was kindly received by a person, who, though he has taken his leave of the Court, has carried the civility and good taste of it into the country." Which, considering what we know of the Court in those days, makes the benefit afforded to the rural fast-

nesses of Cambridgeshire more than a doubtful one.*

. . . . . .

After we have considered such men as Buckingham and Rochester and Dorset; Etheredge and Sedley and Wycherley; Brouncker and Jermyn, there remains a residuum of rakes who formed the Court of Charles II; and such names as those of Lord Arran, Lord Vaughan, who we are told was a lewder fellow even than Sedley, Sir George Berkley, afterwards Lord Falmouth, James and George Hamilton, Jack Talbot, and others, occur to the mind as prominent in a society which was more openly immoral and decadent than perhaps any in the annals of the country. But none of these men, although Grammont makes much of their unruly doings, can be said to be prominent or exactly typical. They were all occupied in such pleasures as the period of Charles II has made familiar to us: horse-racing at Newmarket, gambling at Whitehall, and above all the pursuit of women, indifferently in the palace of the sovereign or in the hardly less notorious haunts in other parts of the city. To them can be added such panders as William Chiffinch and Edward Progers,†

* At Rushbrooke there are two portraits of Jermyn: one of which represents him with his wife and daughter.

† Among the Story-Maskeleyne MSS. is an account of Progers and his two brothers, Henry and Philip, all of whom appear to have had some subsidiary offices at Court. Edward, who had been page of honour to Charles I, was a Groom of the Bedchamber to Charles II. The family was one of some distinction in Monmouthshire and Breconshire.

with the Killigrews playing like a lambent flame about the vitiated atmosphere of the royal dwellings at Whitehall and St. James's.

The philosopher looking back on such an environment will see in it much the same elements as constituted those earlier days of decadence in Greece and Rome, and which had a revival in the Italy of the Borgias and the Medicis; he will see, too, that even at a later date, in our own country, in the days of the Regency, these traits in human nature to which such full play was given at the time of the Restoration, and for a number of years after, were not absent although they were rather more circumspectly indulged. The prude (of either sex) will hold up the hands of horror at what is known to have taken place, but which convention will not permit of being described except by implication, these two hundred and odd years ago, and will be inclined to point to Charles II and his Court as the acme of degradation. The fact cannot be denied. Grave and thoughtful men of their own day said as much, and Pepys and Evelyn, Burnet and Clarendon, only to mention these well-known annalists, were not a whit behind the purist of to-day in fulminating against a section of society which was incapable of shame and too often of honour.

Well, let us leave it at that. It was mad and bad and sad; but it was undoubtedly sweet. Those gay thoughtless ones found the flesh very

weak; they found pleasure very attractive; but they were very human. Perhaps in this their humanity was most apparent: that they were natural according to their lights; and there have been many men and women with highly moral records who, unassailed by temptation, have found it not difficult to be decorous, but who may not have been, except in outward appearance, better than the gay throng to which something may be forgiven because at least they loved much.

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